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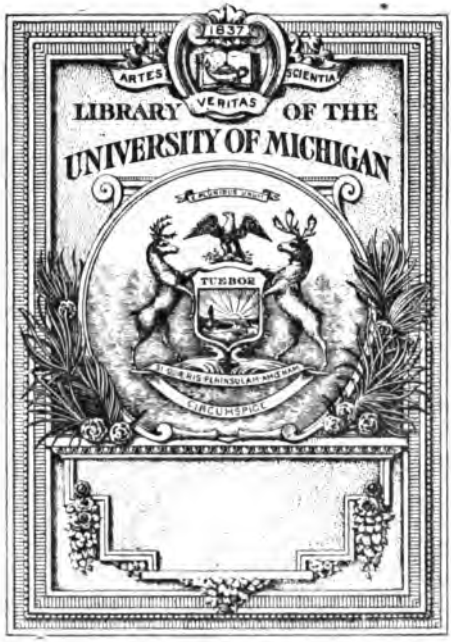
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ANNALS OF A QUIET NEIGHBOURHOOD.

By GEORGE MAC DONALD, M.A.,

AUTHOR OF "DAVID ELGINBROD," "ALEC FORBES OF HOWGLEN," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ANNALS OF
A QUIET NEIGHBOURHOOD.

CHAPTER I.

AN ANGEL UNAWARES.

FEELING rather more than the usual reaction so well-known to clergymen after the concentrated duties of the Sunday, I resolved on Monday to have the long country walk I had been disappointed of on the Saturday previous. It was such a day as it seems impossible to describe except in negatives. It was not stormy, it was not rainy, it was not sunshiny, it was not snowy, it was not frosty, it was not foggy, it was not clear, it was nothing but cloudy and quiet and cold

and generally ungenial, with just a puff of wind now and then to give an assertion to its ungeniality. I should not in the least have cared to tell what sort the day was, had it not been an exact representation of my own mind. It was not the day that made me such as itself. The weather could always easily influence the surface of my mind, my external mood, but it could never go much further. The smallest pleasure would break through the conditions that merely came of such a day. But this morning my whole mind and heart seemed like the day. The summer was thousands of miles off on the other side of the globe. Ethelwyn, up at the old house there across the river, seemed millions of miles away. The summer *might* come back; she never would come nearer: it was absurd to expect it. For in such moods stupidity constantly arrogates to itself the qualities and claims of insight. In fact, it passes itself off for common

sense, making the most dreary ever appear the most reasonable. In such moods a man might almost be persuaded that it was ridiculous to expect any such poetic absurdity as the summer, with its diamond mornings and its opal evenings, ever to come again; nay, to think that it ever had had any existence except in the fancies of the human heart—one of its castles in the air. The whole of life seemed faint and foggy, with no red in it anywhere; and when I glanced at my present relations in Marshmallows, I could not help finding several circumstances to give some appearance of justice to this appearance of things. I seemed to myself to have done no good. I had driven Catherine Weir to the verge of suicide, while at the same time I could not restrain her from the contemplation of some dire revenge. I had lost the man upon whom I had most reckoned as a seal of my ministry, namely Thomas Weir. True there was Old Rogers; but Old Rogers

was just as good before I found him. I could not dream of having made him any better. And so I went on brooding over all the disappointing portions of my labour, all the time thinking about myself, instead of God and the work that lay for me to do in the days to come.

"Nobody," I said, "but Old Rogers understands me. Nobody would care, as far as my teaching goes, if another man took my place from next Sunday forward. And for Miss Oldcastle, her playing the *Agnus Dei* on Saturday afternoon, even if she intended that I should hear it, could only indicate at most that she knew how she had behaved to me in the morning, and thought she had gone too far and been unkind, or perhaps was afraid lest she should be accountable for any failure I might make in my Sunday duties, and therefore felt bound to do something to restore my equanimity."

Choosing, though without consciously intending to do so, the dreariest path to be found, I wandered up the side of the slow black river, with the sentinel pollards looking at themselves in its gloomy mirror, just as I was looking at myself in the mirror of my circumstances. They leaned in all directions, irregular as the headstones in an ancient churchyard. In the summer they looked like explosions of green leaves at the best; now they looked like the burnt-out cases of the summer's fireworks. How different, too, was the river from the time when a whole fleet of shining white lilies lay anchored among their own broad green leaves upon its clear waters, filled with sunlight in every pore, as they themselves would fill the pores of a million-caverned sponge! But I could not even recall the past summer as beautiful. I seemed to care for nothing. The first miserable afternoon at Marshmallows looked now as if it

had been the whole of my coming relation to the place seen through a reversed telescope. And here I was *in* it now.

The walk along the side was tolerably dry, although the river was bank-full. But when I came to the bridge I wanted to cross—a wooden one—I found that the approach to it had been partly undermined and carried away, for here the river had overflowed its banks in one of the late storms; and all about the place was still very wet and swampy. I could therefore get no farther in my gloomy walk, and so turned back upon my steps. Scarcely had I done so, when I saw a man coming hastily towards me from far upon the straight line of the river walk. I could not mistake him at any distance. It was Old Rogers. I felt both ashamed and comforted when I recognized him.

"Well, Old Rogers," I said, as soon as he came within hail, trying to speak cheerfully,

"you cannot get much farther this way—without wading a bit, at least."

"I don't want to go no farther now, sir. I came to find you."

"Nothing amiss, I hope?"

"Nothing as I knows on, sir. I only wanted to have a little chat with you. I told master I wanted to leave for an hour or so. He allus lets me do just as I like."

"But how did you know where to find me?"

"I saw you come this way. You passed me right on the bridge, and didn't see me, sir. So says I to myself, 'Old Rogers, summat's amiss wi' parson to-day. He never went by me like that afore. This won't do. You just go and see.' So I went home and told master, and here I be, sir. And I hope you're noways offended with the liberty of me."

"Did I really pass you on the bridge?" I said, unable to understand it.

"That you did, sir. I knowed parson must be a goodish bit in his own in'ards afore he would do that."

"I needn't tell you I didn't see you, Old Rogers."

"I could tell you that, sir. I hope there's nothing gone main wrong, sir. Miss is well, sir, I hope?"

"Quite well, I thank you. No, my dear fellow, nothing 's gone main wrong, as you say. Some of my running tackle got jammed a bit, that 's all. I 'm a little out of spirits, I believe."

"Well sir, don't you be afeard I 'm going to be troublesome. Don't think I want to get aboard your ship, except you fling me a rope. There 's a many things you mun ha' to think about that an ignorant man like me couldn't take up if you was to let 'em drop. And being a gentleman, I do believe, makes the matter worse betuxt us. And there 's many

a thing that no man can go talkin' about to any but only the Lord himself. Still you can't help us poor folks seeing when there 's summat amiss, and we can't help havin' our own thoughts any more than the sailor's jackdaw that couldn't speak. And sometimes we may be nearer the mark than you would suppose, for God has made us all of one blood, you know."

"What *are* you driving at, Old Rogers?" I said with a smile, which was none the less true that I suspected he had read some of the worst trouble of my heart. For why should I mind an honourable man like him knowing what oppressed me, though, as things were, I certainly should not, as he said, choose to tell it to any but one?

"I don't want to say what I was driving at, if it was anything but this—that I want to put to the clumsy hand of a rough old tar, with a heart as soft as the pitch that makes his hand

hard—to trim your sails a bit, sir, and help you to lie a point closer to the wind. You 're not just close-hauled, sir."

"Say on, Old Rogers. I understand you, and I will listen with all my heart, for you have a good right to speak."

And Old Rogers spoke thus :—

"Oncet upon a time, I made a voyage in a merchant barque. We were becalmed in the South Seas. And weary work it wur, a doin' of nothin' from day to day. But when the water began to come up thick from the bottom of the water-casks, it was wearier a deal. Then a thick fog came on, as white as snow a'most, and we couldn't see more than a few yards ahead or on any side of us. But the fog didn't keep the heat off; it only made it worse, and the water was fast going done. The short allowance grew shorter and shorter, and the men, some of them, were half-mad with thirst, and began to look bad at one another. I kept up

my heart by looking ahead inside me. For days and days the fog hung about us as if the air had been made o' flocks o' wool. The captain took to his berth, and several of the crew to their hammocks, for it was just as hot on deck as anywhere else. The mate lay on a sparesail on the quarter-deck, groaning. I had a strong suspicion that the schooner was drifting, and hove the lead again and again, but could find no bottom. Some of the men got hold of the spirits, and *that* didn't quench their thirst. It drove them clean mad. I had to knock one of them down myself with a capstan bar, for he ran at the mate with his knife. At last I began to lose all hope. And still I was sure the schooner was slowly drifting. My head was like to burst, and my tongue was like a lump of holystone in my mouth. Well, one morning, I had just, as I thought, lain down on the deck to breathe my last, hoping I should die before I went quite mad with thirst, when

all at once the fog lifted, like the foot of a sail. I sprung to my feet. There was the blue sky overhead; but the terrible burning sun was there. A moment more and a light air blew on my cheek, and, turning my face to it as if it had been the very breath of God, there was an island within half a mile, and I saw the shine of water on the face of a rock on the shore. I cried out, 'Land on the weather-quarter! Water in sight!' In a moment more a boat was lowered, and in a few minutes the boat's crew, of which I was one, were lying, clothes and all, in a little stream that came down from the hills above.—There, Mr Walton! that's what I wanted to say to you."

This is as near the story of my old friend as my limited knowledge of sea affairs allows me to report it.

"I understand you quite, Old Rogers, and I thank you heartily," I said.

"No doubt," resumed he, "King Solomon was quite right, as he always was, I suppose, in what he *said*, for his wisdom mun ha' laid mostly in the tongue—right, I say, when he said, 'Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth;' but I can't help thinking there's another side to it. I think it would be as good advice to a man on the other tack, whose boasting lay far to windward, and he close on a lee-shore wi' breakers—it wouldn't be amiss to say to him, 'Don't strike your colours to the morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.' There's just as many good days as bad ones; as much fair weather as foul in the days to come. And if a man keeps up heart, he's all the better for that, and none the worse when the evil day does come. But, God forgive me! I'm talking like a heathen. As if there was any chance about what the days would bring forth. No, my

lad," said the old sailor, assuming the dignity of his superior years under the inspiration of the truth, "boast nor trust nor hope in the morrow. Boast and trust and hope in God, for thou shalt yet praise Him, who is the health of thy countenance and thy God."

I could but hold out my hand. I had nothing to say. For he had spoken to me as an angel of God.

The old man was silent for some moments: his emotion needed time to still itself again. Nor did he return to the subject. He held out his hand once more, saying—

"Good day, sir. I must go back to my work."

"I will go back with you," I returned.

And so we walked back side by side to the village, but not a word did we speak the one to the other, till we shook hands and parted upon the bridge, where we had first met. Old Rogers went to his work, and I lingered upon

the bridge. I leaned upon the low parapet, and looked up the stream as far as the mists creeping about the banks, and hovering in thinnest veils over the surface of the water, would permit. Then I turned and looked down the river crawling on to the sweep it made out of sight just where Mr Brownrigg's farm began to come down to its banks. Then I looked to the left, and there stood my old church, as quiet in the dreary day, though not so bright, as in the sunshine: even the graves themselves must look yet more "solemn sad" in a wintry day like this, than they look when the sunlight that infolds them proclaims that God is not the God of the dead but of the living. One of the great battles that we have to fight in this world—for twenty great battles have to be fought all at once and in one—is the battle with appearances. I turned me to the right, and there once more I saw, as on that first afternoon, the weathercock that

watched the winds over the stables at Old-castle Hall. It had caught just one glimpse of the sun through some rent in the vapours, and flung it across to me, ere it vanished again amid the general dinginess of the hour.

CHAPTER II.

TWO PARISHIONERS.

I HAVE said, near the beginning of my story, that my parish was a large one: how is it that I have mentioned but one of the great families in it, and have indeed confined my recollections entirely to the village and its immediate neighbourhood? Will my reader have patience while I explain this to him a little? First, as he may have observed, my personal attraction is towards the poor rather than the rich. I was made so. I can generally get

nearer the poor than the rich. But I say *generally*, for I have known a few rich people quite as much to my mind as the best of the poor. Thereupon, of course, their education would give them the advantage with me in the possibilities of communion. But when the heart is right, and there is a good stock of common sense as well,—a gift predominant, as far as I am aware, in no one class over another, education will turn the scale very gently with me. And then when I reflect that some of these poor people would have made nobler ladies and gentlemen than all but two or three I know, if they had only had the opportunity, there is a reaction towards the poor, something like a feeling of favour because they have not had fair play—a feeling soon modified, though not altered, by the reflection that they are such because God who loves them better than we do, has so ordered their lot, and by the recollection that not

only was our Lord himself poor, but He said the poor were blessed. And let me just say in passing that I not only believe it because He said it, but I believe it because I see that it is so. I think sometimes that the world must have been especially created for the poor, and that particular allowances will be made for the rich because they are born into such disadvantages, and with their wickednesses and their miseries, their love of spiritual dirt and meanness, subserve the highest growth and emancipation of the poor, that they may inherit both the earth and the kingdom of heaven.

But I have been once more wandering from my subject.

Thus it was that the people in the village lying close to my door attracted most of my attention at first; of which attention those more immediately associated with the village, as, for instance, the inhabitants of the Hall,

came in for a share, although they did not belong to the same class.

Again, the houses of most of the gentlefolk lay considerably apart from the church and from each other. Many of them went elsewhere to church, and I did not feel bound to visit those, for I had enough to occupy me without, and had little chance of getting a hold of them to do them good. Still there were one or two families which I would have visited oftener, I confess, had I been more interested in them, or had I had a horse. Therefore, I ought to have bought a horse sooner than I did. Before this winter was over, however, I did buy one, partly to please Dr Duncan, who urged me to it for the sake of my health, partly because I could then do my duty better, and partly, I confess, from having been very fond of an old mare of my father's, when I was a boy, living, after my mother's death, at a farm of his in B—shire.

Happening to come across a gray mare very much like her, I bought her at once.

I think it was the very day after the events recorded in my last chapter that I mounted her to pay a visit to two rich maiden ladies, whose carriage stopped at the Lych-gate most Sundays when the weather was favourable, but whom I had called upon only once since I came to the parish. I should not have thought this visit worth mentioning, except for the conversation I had with them, during which a hint or two were dropped which had an influence in colouring my thoughts for some time after.

I was shown with much ceremony by a butler, as old apparently as his livery of yellow and green, into the presence of the two ladies, one of whom sat in state reading a volume of the *Spectator*. She was very tall, and as square as the straight long-backed chair upon which she sat. A fat asthmatic poodle lay at

her feet upon the hearth-rug. The other, a little lively gray-haired creature, who looked like a most ancient girl whom no power of gathering years would ever make old, was standing upon a high chair, making love to a demoniacal-looking cockatoo in a gilded cage. As I entered the room, the latter all but jumped from her perch with a merry though wavering laugh, and advanced to meet me.

"Jonathan, bring the cake and wine," she cried to the retreating servant.

The former rose with a solemn stiff-backedness, which was more amusing than dignified, and extended her hand as I approached her, without moving from her place.

"We were afraid, Mr Walton," said the little lady, "that you had forgotten we were parishioners of yours."

"That I could hardly do," I answered, "seeing you are such regular attendants at church. But I confess I have given you

ground for your rebuke, Miss Crowther. I bought a horse, however, the other day, and this is the first use I have put him to."

"We're charmed to see you. It is very good of you not to forget such uninteresting girls as we are."

"You forget, Jemima," interposed her sister, in a feminine bass, "that time is always on the wing. I should have thought we were both decidedly middle-aged, though you are the elder by I will not say how many years."

"All but ten years, Hester. I remember rocking you in your cradle scores of times. But somehow, Mr Walton, I can't help feeling as if she were my elder sister. She is so learned, you see; and I don't read anything but the newspapers."

"And your Bible, Jemima. Do yourself justice."

"That's a matter of course, sister. But this is not the way to entertain Mr Walton."

"The gentlemen used to entertain the ladies when *I* was young, Jemima. I do not know how it may have been when you were."

"Much the same, I believe, sister. But if you look at Mr Walton, I think you will see that he is pretty much entertained as it is."

"I agree with Miss Hester," I said. "It is the duty of gentlemen to entertain ladies. But it is so much the kinder of ladies when they surpass their duty, and condescend to entertain gentlemen."

"What can surpass duty, Mr Walton? I confess I do not agree with your doctrines upon that point."

"I do not quite understand you, Miss Hester," I returned.

"Why, Mr Walton—I hope you will not think me rude, but it always seems to me—and it has given me much pain, when I consider that your congregation is chiefly composed of the lower classes, who may be greatly

injured by such a style of preaching. I must say I think so, Mr Walton. Only perhaps you are one of those who think a lady's opinion on such matters is worth nothing."

"On the contrary, I respect an opinion just as far as the lady or gentleman who holds it seems to me qualified to have formed it first. But you have not yet told me what you think so objectionable in my preaching."

"You always speak as if faith in Christ was something greater than duty. Now I think duty the first thing."

"I quite agree with you, Miss Crowther. For how can I, or any clergyman, urge a man to that which is not his duty? But tell me, is not faith in Christ a duty? Where you have mistaken me is, that you think I speak of faith as higher than duty, when indeed I speak of faith as higher than any *other* duty. It is the highest duty of man. I do not say the duty he always sees clearest, or even sees at all.

But the fact is, that when that which is a duty becomes the highest delight of a man, the joy of his very being, he no more thinks or needs to think about it as a duty. What would you think of the love of a son who, when an appeal was made to his affections, should say, 'Oh yes, I love my mother dearly: it is my duty, of course?'"

"That sounds very plausible, Mr Walton; but still I cannot help feeling that you preach faith and not works. I do not say that you are not to preach faith, of course; but you know faith without works is dead."

"Now, really, Hester," interposed Miss Jemima, "I cannot think how it is, but, for my part, I should have said that Mr Walton was constantly preaching works. He 's always telling you to do something or other. I know I always come out of the church with something on my mind; and I 've got to work it off somehow before I 'm comfortable."

And here Miss Jemima got up on the chair again, and began to flirt with the cockatoo once more, but only in silent signs.

I cannot quite recall how this part of the conversation drew to a close. But I will tell a fact or two about the sisters which may possibly explain how it was that they took up such different notions of my preaching. The elder scarce left the house, but spent almost the whole of her time in reading small dingy books of eighteenth century literature. She believed in no other; thought Shakespeare sentimental where he was not low, and Bacon pompous; Addison thoroughly respectable and gentlemanly. Pope was the great English poet, incomparably before Milton. The "Essay on Man" contained the deepest wisdom; the "Rape of the Lock" the most graceful imagination to be found in the language. The "Vicar of Wakefield" was pretty, but foolish; while in philosophy, Paley was perfect, especially in his notion of happi-

ness, which she had heard objected to, and therefore warmly defended. Somehow or other, respectability—in position, in morals, in religion, in conduct—was everything. The consequence was that her very nature was old-fashioned, and had nothing in it of that lasting youth which is the birthright—so often despised—of every immortal being. But I have already said more about her than her place in my story justifies.

Miss Crowther, on the contrary, whose eccentricities did not lie on the side of respectability, had gone on shocking the stiff proprieties of her younger sister till she could be shocked no more, and gave in as to the hopelessness of fate. She had had a severe disappointment in youth, had not only survived it, but saved her heart alive out of it, losing only, as far as appeared to the eyes of her neighbours at least, any remnant of selfish care about herself; and she now spent the love which had before been

concentrated upon one object, upon every living thing that came near her, even to her sister's sole favourite, the wheezing poodle. She was very odd, it must be confessed, with her gray hair, her clear gray eye with wrinkled eyelids, her light step, her laugh at once girlish and cracked; darting in and out of the cottages, scolding this matron with a lurking smile in every tone, hugging that baby, boxing the ears of the other little tyrant, passing this one's rent, and threatening that other with awful vengeances, but it was a very lovely oddity. Their property was not large, and she knew every living thing on the place down to the dogs and pigs. And Miss Jemima, as the people always called her, transferring the *Miss Crowther* of primogeniture to the younger, who kept, like King Henry IV.,—

> "Her presence, like a robe pontifical,
> Ne'er seen but wonder'd at,"

was the actual queen of the neighbourhood;

for, though she was the very soul of kindness, she was determined to have her own way, and had it.

Although I did not know all this at the time, such were the two ladies who held these different opinions about my preaching; the one who did nothing but read Messrs Addison, Pope, Paley, and Co., considering that I neglected the doctrine of works as the seal of faith, and the one who was busy helping her neighbours from morning to night, finding little in my preaching, except incentive to benevolence.

The next point where my recollection can take up the conversation, is where Miss Hester made the following further criticism on my pulpit labours.

"You are too anxious to explain everything, Mr Walton."

I pause in my recording, to do my critic the justice of remarking that what she said looks

worse on paper than it sounded from her lips; for she was a gentlewoman, and the tone has much to do with the impression made by the intellectual contents of all speech.

"Where can be the use of trying to make uneducated people see the grounds of everything?" she said. "It is enough that this or that is in the Bible."

"Yes; but there is just the point. What is in the Bible? Is it this or that?"

"You are their spiritual instructor: tell them what is in the Bible."

"But you have just been objecting to my mode of representing what is in the Bible."

"It will be so much the worse, if you add argument to convince them of what is incorrect."

"I doubt that. Falsehood will expose itself the sooner that honest argument is used to support it."

"You cannot expect them to judge of what you tell them."

"The Bible urges upon us to search and understand."

"I grant that for those whose business it is, like yourself."

"Do you think, then, that the Church consists of a few privileged to understand, and a great many who cannot understand, and therefore need not be taught?"

"I said you had to teach them."

"But to teach is to make people understand."

"I don't think so. If you come to that, how much can the wisest of us understand? You remember what Pope says,—

> 'Superior beings, when of late they saw
> A mortal man unfold all Nature's law,
> Admired such wisdom in an earthly shape,
> And show'd a Newton as we show an ape'?"

"I do not know the passage. Pope is not my Bible. I should call such superior beings very inferior beings indeed."

"Do you call the angels inferior beings?"

"Such angels, certainly."

"He means the good angels, of course."

"And I say the good angels could never behave like that, for contempt is one of the lowest spiritual conditions in which any being can place himself. Our Lord says, 'Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for their angels do always behold the face of my Father, who is in heaven.'"

"Now will you even say that you understand that passage?"

"Practically, well enough; just as the poorest man of my congregation may understand it. I am not to despise one of the little ones. Pope represents the angels as despising a Newton even."

"And you despise Pope."

"I hope not. I say he was full of despising, and therefore, if for no other reason, a small man."

"Surely you do not jest at his bodily infirmities?"

"I had forgotten them quite."

"In every other sense he was a great man."

"I cannot allow it. He was intellectually a great man, but morally a small man."

"Such refinements are not easily followed."

"I will undertake to make the poorest woman in my congregation understand that."

"Why don't you try your friend Mrs Oldcastle, then? It might do her a little good," said Miss Hester, now becoming, I thought, a little spiteful at hearing her favourite treated so unceremoniously. I found afterwards that there was some kindness in it, however.

"I should have very little influence with Mrs Oldcastle if I were to make the attempt. But I am not called upon to address my flock individually upon every point of character."

"I thought she was an intimate friend of yours."

"Quite the contrary. We are scarcely friendly."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Miss Jemima, who had been silent during the little controversy that her sister and I had been carrying on. "We have been quite misinformed. The fact is, we thought we might have seen more of you if it had not been for her. And as very few people of her own position in society care to visit her, we thought it a pity she should be your principal friend in the parish."

"Why do they not visit her more?"

"There are strange stories about her, which it is as well to leave alone. They are getting out of date too. But she is not a fit woman to be regarded as the clergyman's friend. There!" said Miss Jemima, as if she had wanted to relieve her bosom of a burden, and had done it.

"I think, however, her religious opinions would correspond with your own, Mr Walton," said Miss Hester.

"Possibly," I answered, with indifference; "I don't care much about opinion."

"Her daughter would be a nice girl, I fancy, if she weren't kept down by her mother. She looks scared, poor thing! And they say she's not quite—the thing, you know," said Miss Jemima.

"What *do* you mean, Miss Crowther?"

She gently tapped her forehead with a forefinger.

I laughed. I thought it was not worth my while to enter as the champion of Miss Oldcastle's sanity.

"They are, and have been, a strange family as far back as I can remember; and my mother used to say the same. I am glad she comes to our church now. You mustn't let her set her cap at you, though, Mr Walton. It wouldn't do at all. She's pretty enough, too!"

"Yes," I returned, "she is rather pretty.

But I don't think she looks as if she had a cap to set at anybody."

I rose to go, for I did not relish any further pursuit of the conversation in the same direction.

I rode home slowly, brooding on the lovely marvel, that out of such a rough ungracious stem as the Oldcastle family, should have sprung such a delicate, pale, winter-braved flower, as Ethelwyn. And I prayed that I might be honoured to rescue her from the ungenial soil and atmosphere to which the machinations of her mother threatened to confine her for the rest of a suffering life.

CHAPTER III.

SATAN CAST OUT.

I WAS within a mile of the village, returning from my visit to the Misses Crowther, when my horse, which was walking slowly along the soft side of the road, lifted his head, and pricked up his ears at the sound, which he heard first, of approaching hoofs. The riders soon came in sight—Miss Oldcastle, Judy, and Captain Everard. Miss Oldcastle I had never seen on horseback before. Judy was on a little white pony she used to gallop about the fields near

the Hall. The Captain was laughing and chatting gaily as they drew near, now to the one, now to the other. Being on my own side of the road I held straight on, not wishing to stop or to reveal the signs of a distress which had almost overwhelmed me. I felt as cold as death, or rather as if my whole being had been deprived of vitality by a sudden exhaustion around me of the ethereal element of life. I believe I did not alter my bearing, but remained with my head bent, for I had been thinking hard just before, till we were on the point of meeting, when I lifted my hat to Miss Oldcastle, without drawing bridle, and went on. The Captain returned my salutation, and likewise rode on. I could just see, as they passed me, that Miss Oldcastle's pale face was flushed even to scarlet, but she only bowed and kept alongside of her companion. I thought I had escaped conversation, and had gone about twenty yards farther, when I heard the

clatter of Judy's pony behind me, and up she came at full gallop.

"Why didn't you stop to speak to us, Mr Walton?" she said. "I pulled up, but you never looked at me. We shall be cross all the rest of the day, because you cut us so. What have we done?"

"Nothing, Judy, that I know of," I answered, trying to speak cheerfully. "But I do not know your companion, and I was not in the humour for an introduction."

She looked hard at me with her keen gray eyes; and I felt as if the child was seeing through me.

"I don't know what to make of it, Mr Walton. You're very different somehow from what you used to be. There's something wrong somewhere. But I suppose you would all tell me it's none of my business. So I won't ask questions. Only I wish I could do anything for you."

I felt the child's kindness, but could only say—

"Thank you, Judy. I am sure I should ask you if there were anything you could do for me. But you 'll be left behind."

"No fear of that. My Dobbin can go much faster than their big horses. But I see you don't want me, so good-bye."

She turned her pony's head as she spoke, jumped the ditch at the side of the road, and flew after them along the grass like a swallow. I likewise roused my horse and went off at a hard trot, with the vain impulse so to shake off the tormenting thoughts that crowded on me like gadflies. But this day was to be one of more trial still.

As I turned a corner, almost into the street of the village, Tom Weir was at my side. He had evidently been watching for me. His face was so pale, that I saw in a moment something had happened.

"What is the matter, Tom?" I asked, in some alarm.

He did not reply for a moment, but kept unconsciously stroking my horse's neck, and staring at me "with wide blue eyes."

"Come, Tom," I repeated, "tell me what is the matter."

I could see his bare throat knot and relax, like the motion of a serpent, before he could utter the words.

"Kate has killed her little boy, sir."

He followed them with a stifled cry—almost a scream, and hid his face in his hands.

"God forbid!" I exclaimed, and struck my heels in my horse's sides, nearly overturning poor Tom in my haste.

"She's mad, sir; she's mad," he cried, as I rode off.

"Come after me," I said, "and take the mare home. I shan't be able to leave your sister."

Had I had a share, by my harsh words, in driving the woman beyond the bounds of human reason and endurance? The thought was dreadful. But I must not let my mind rest on it now, lest I should be unfitted for what might have to be done. Before I reached the door, I saw a little crowd of the villagers, mostly women and children, gathered about it. I got off my horse, and gave him to a woman to hold till Tom should come up. With a little difficulty, I prevailed on the rest to go home at once, and not add to the confusions and terrors of the unhappy affair by the excitement of their presence. As soon as they had yielded to my arguments, I entered the shop, which to my annoyance I found full of the neighbours. These likewise I got rid of as soon as possible, and locking the door behind them, went up to the room above.

To my surprise, I found no one there. On the hearth and in the fender lay two little

pools of blood. All in the house was utterly still. It was very dreadful. I went to the only other door. It was not bolted as I had expected to find it. I opened it, peeped in, and entered. On the bed lay the mother, white as death, but with her black eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling; and on her arm lay little Gerard, as white, except where the blood had flowed from the bandage that could not confine it, down his sweet deathlike face. His eyes were fast closed, and he had no sign of life about him. I shut the door behind me, and approached the bed. When Catherine caught sight of me, she showed no surprise or emotion of any kind. Her lips, with automaton-like movement, uttered the words—

"I have done it at last. I am ready. Take me away. I shall be hanged. I don't care. I confess it. Only don't let the people stare at me."

Her lips went on moving, but I could hear no more till suddenly she broke out—

"Oh! my baby! my baby!" and gave a cry of such agony as I hope never to hear again while I live.

At this moment I heard a loud knocking at the shop-door, which was the only entrance to the house, and remembering that I had locked it, I went down to see who was there. I found Thomas Weir, the father, accompanied by Dr Duncan, whom, as it happened, he had had some difficulty in finding. Thomas had sped to his daughter the moment he heard the rumour of what had happened, and his fierceness in clearing the shop had at least prevented the neighbours, even in his absence, from intruding further.

We went up together to Catherine's room. Thomas said nothing to me about what had happened, and I found it difficult even to conjecture from his countenance what thoughts were passing through his mind.

Catherine looked from one to another of us,

as if she did not know the one from the other. She made no motion to rise from her bed, nor did she utter a word, although her lips would now and then move as if moulding a sentence. When Dr Duncan, after looking at the child, proceeded to take him from her, she gave him one imploring look, and yielded with a moan; then began to stare hopelessly at the ceiling again. The doctor carried the child into the next room, and the grandfather followed.

"You see what you have driven me to!" cried Catherine, the moment I was left alone with her. "I hope you are satisfied."

The words went to my very soul. But when I looked at her, her eyes were wandering about over the ceiling, and I had and still have difficulty in believing that she spoke the words, and that they were not an illusion of my sense, occasioned by the commotion of my own feelings. I thought it better, however, to leave her, and join the others in the sitting-

room. The first thing I saw there was Thomas on his knees, with a basin of water, washing away the blood of his grandson from his daughter's floor. The very sight of the child had hitherto been nauseous to him, and his daughter had been beyond the reach of his forgiveness. Here was the end of it—the blood of the one shed by the hand of the other, and the father of both, who had disdained both, on his knees, wiping it up. Dr Duncan was giving the child brandy; for he had found that he had been sick, and that the loss of blood was the chief cause of his condition. The blood flowed from a wound on the head, extending backwards from the temple, which had evidently been occasioned by a fall upon the fender, where the blood lay both inside and out; and the doctor took the sickness as a sign that the brain had not been seriously injured by the blow. In a few minutes he said—

"I think he 'll come round."

"Will it be safe to tell his mother so?" I asked.

"Yes: I think you may."

I hastened to her room.

"Your little darling is not dead, Catherine. He is coming to."

She *threw* herself off the bed at my feet, caught them round with her arms, and cried—

"I will forgive him. I will do anything you like. I forgive George Everard. I will go and ask my father to forgive me."

I lifted her in my arms—how light she was! —and laid her again on the bed, where she burst into tears, and lay sobbing and weeping. I went to the other room. Little Gerard opened his eyes and closed them again, as I entered. The doctor had laid him in his own crib. He said his pulse was improving. I beckoned to Thomas. He followed me.

"She wants to ask you to forgive her," I said. "Do not, in God's name, wait till she

asks you, but go and tell her that you forgive her."

"I dare not say I forgive her," he answered. "I have more need to ask her to forgive me."

I took him by the hand, and led him into her room. She feebly lifted her arms towards him. Not a word was said on either side. I left them in each other's embrace. The hard rocks had been struck with the rod, and the waters of life had flowed forth from each, and had met between.

I have more than once known this in the course of my experience—the ice and snow of a long estrangement suddenly give way, and the boiling geyser-floods of old affection rush from the hot deeps of the heart. I think myself that the very lastingness and strength of animosity have their origin sometimes in the reality of affection: the love lasts all the while, freshly indignant at every new load

heaped upon it; till, at last, a word, a look, a sorrow, a gladness, sets it free; and, forgetting all its claims, it rushes irresistibly towards its ends. Thus was it with Thomas and Catherine Weir.

When I rejoined Dr Duncan, I found little Gerard asleep, and breathing quietly.

"What do you know of this sad business, Mr Walton?" said the doctor.

"I should like to ask the same question of you," I returned. "Young Tom told me that his sister had murdered the child. That is all I know."

"His father told me the same; and that is all I know. Do you believe it?"

"At least we have no evidence about it. It is tolerably certain neither of those two could have been present. They must have received it by report. We must wait till she is able to explain the thing herself."

"Meantime," said Dr Duncan, "all I believe

is, that she struck the child, and that he fell upon the fender."

I may as well inform my reader that, as far as Catherine could give an account of the transaction, this conjecture was corroborated. But the smallest reminder of it evidently filled her with such a horror of self-loathing, that I took care to avoid the subject entirely, after the attempt at explanation which she made at my request. She could not remember with any clearness what had happened. All she remembered was that she had been more miserable than ever in her life before; that the child had come to her, as he seldom did, with some childish request or other; that she felt herself seized with intense hatred of him; and the next thing she knew was that his blood was running in a long red finger towards her. Then it seemed as if that blood had been drawn from her own over-charged heart and brain; she knew what she had done, though

she did not know how she had done it; and the tide of her ebbed affection flowed like the returning waters of the Solway. But beyond her restored love, she remembered nothing more that happened till she lay weeping with the hope that the child would yet live. Probably more particulars returned afterwards, but I took care to ask no more questions. In the increase of illness that followed, I more than once saw her shudder while she slept, and thought she was dreaming what her waking memory had forgotten; and once she started awake, crying, "I have murdered him again."

To return to that first evening:—When Thomas came from his daughter's room, he looked like a man from whom the bitterness of evil had passed away. To human eyes, at least, it seemed as if self had been utterly slain in him. His face had that child-like expression in its paleness, and the tearfulness without tears haunting his eyes, which reminds one of

the feeling of an evening in summer between which and the sultry day preceding it has fallen the gauzy veil of a cooling shower, with a rainbow in the east.

"She is asleep," he said.

"How is it your daughter Mary is not here?" I asked.

"She was taken with a fit the moment she heard the bad news, sir. I left her with nobody but father. I think I must go and look after her now. It 's not the first she 's had neither, though I never told any one before. You won't mention it, sir. It makes people look shy at you, you know, sir."

"Indeed, I won't mention it.—Then she mustn't sit up, and two nurses will be wanted here. You and I must take it to-night, Thomas. You 'll attend to your daughter, if she wants anything, and I know this little darling won't be frightened if he comes to himself, and sees me beside him."

"God bless you, sir," said Thomas, fervently.

And from that hour to this there has never been a coolness between us.

"A very good arrangement," said Dr Duncan; "only I feel as if I ought to have a share in it."

"No, no," I said. "We do not know who may want you. Besides, we are both younger than you."

"I will come over early in the morning, then, and see how you are going on."

As soon as Thomas returned with good news of Mary's recovery, I left him, and went home to tell my sister, and arrange for the night. We carried back with us what things we could think of to make the two patients as comfortable as possible; for, as regarded Catherine, now that she would let her fellows help her, I was even anxious that she should feel something of that love about her which she had so long driven from her door. I felt to-

wards her somewhat as towards a new-born child, for whom this life of mingled weft must be made as soft as its material will admit of; or rather, as if she had been my own sister, as indeed she was, returned from wandering in weary and miry ways, to taste once more the tenderness of home. I wanted her to read the love of God in the love that even I could show her. And, besides, I must confess that, although the result had been, in God's great grace, so good, my heart still smote me for the severity with which I had spoken the truth to her; and it was a relief to myself to endeavour to make some amends for having so spoken to her. But I had no intention of going near her that night, for I thought the less she saw of me the better, till she should be a little stronger, and have had time, with the help of her renewed feelings, to get over the painful associations so long accompanying the thought of me. So I took my place be-

side Gerard, and watched through the night. The little fellow repeatedly cried out in that terror which is so often the consequence of the loss of blood; but when I laid my hand on him, he smiled without waking, and lay quite still again for a while. Once or twice he woke up, and looked so bewildered that I feared delirium; but a little jelly composed him, and he fell fast asleep again. He did not seem even to have headache from the blow.

But when I was left alone with the child, seated in a chair by the fire, my only light, how my thoughts rushed upon the facts bearing on my own history which this day had brought before me! Horror it was to think of Miss Oldcastle even as only riding with the seducer of Catherine Weir. There was torture in the thought of his touching her hand; and to think that before the summer came once more, he might be her husband! I will not dwell on the sufferings of that night more

than is needful; for even now, in my old age, I cannot recall without renewing them. But I must indicate one train of thought which kept passing through my mind with constant recurrence:—Was it fair to let her marry such a man in ignorance? Would she marry him if she knew what I knew of him? Could I speak against my rival?—blacken him even with the truth—the only defilement that can really cling? Could I for my own dignity do so? And was she therefore to be sacrificed in ignorance? Might not some one else do it instead of me? But if I set it agoing, was it not precisely the same thing as if I did it myself, only more cowardly? There was but one way of doing it, and that was—with the full and solemn consciousness that it was and must be a barrier between us for ever. If I could give her up fully and altogether, then I might tell her the truth which was to preserve her from marrying such a man as my rival. And

I must do so, sooner than that she, my very dream of purity and gentle truth, should wed defilement. But how bitter to cast away my *chance!* as I said, in the gathering despair of that black night. And although every time I said it—for the same words would come over and over as in a delirious dream—I repeated yet again to myself that wonderful line of Spenser,—

"It chanced—eternal God that chance did guide,"

yet the words never grew into spirit in me; they remained "words, words, words," and meant nothing to my feeling—hardly even to my judgment meant anything at all. Then came another bitter thought, the bitterness of which was wicked: it flashed upon me that my own earnestness with Catherine Weir, in urging her to the duty of forgiveness, would bear a main part in wrapping up in secrecy that evil thing which ought not to be hid. For had she not vowed—with the same facts

before her which now threatened to crush my heart into a lump of clay—to denounce the man at the very altar? Had not the revenge which I had ignorantly combated been my best ally? And for one brief, black, wicked moment I repented that I had acted as I had acted. The next I was on my knees by the side of the sleeping child, and had repented back again in shame and sorrow. Then came the consolation that if I suffered hereby, I suffered from doing my duty. And that was well.

Scarcely had I seated myself again by the fire when the door of the room opened softly, and Thomas appeared.

"Kate is very strange, sir," he said, "and wants to see you."

I rose at once.

"Perhaps, then, you had better stay with Gerard."

"I will, sir; for I think she wants to speak to you alone."

I entered her chamber. A candle stood on a chest of drawers, and its light fell on her face, once more flushed in those two spots with the glow of the unseen fire of disease. Her eyes, too, glittered again, but the fierceness was gone, and only the suffering remained. I drew a chair beside her, and took her hand. She yielded it willingly, even returned the pressure of kindness which I offered to the thin trembling fingers.

"You are too good, sir," she said. "I want to tell you all. He promised to marry me. I believed him. But I did very wrong. And I have been a bad mother, for I could not keep from seeing his face in Gerard's. Gerard was the name he told me to call him when I had to write to him, and so I named the little darling Gerard. How is he, sir?"

"Doing nicely," I replied. "I do not think you need be at all uneasy about him now."

"Thank God. I forgive his father now with all my heart. I feel it easier since I saw how wicked I could be myself. And I feel it easier, too, that I have not long to live. I forgive him with all my heart, and I will take no revenge. I will not tell one who he is. I have never told any one yet. But I will tell you. His name is George Everard—Captain Everard. I came to know him when I was apprenticed at Addicehead. I would not tell you, sir, if I did not know that you will not tell any one. I know you so well that I will not ask you not. I saw him yesterday, and it drove me wild. But it is all over now. My heart feels so cool now. Do you think God will forgive me?"

Without one word of my own, I took out my pocket Testament and read these words:—

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

Then I read to her, from the seventh chap-

ter of St Luke's Gospel, the story of the woman who was a sinner and came to Jesus in Simon's house, that she might see how the Lord himself thought and felt about such. When I had finished, I found that she was gently weeping, and so I left her, and resumed my place beside the boy. I told Thomas that he had better not go near her just yet. So we sat in silence together for a while, during which I felt so weary and benumbed, that I neither cared to resume my former train of thought, nor to enter upon the new one suggested by the confession of Catherine. I believe I must have fallen asleep in my chair, for I suddenly returned to consciousness at a cry from Gerard. I started up, and there was the child fast asleep, but standing on his feet in his crib, pushing with his hands from before him, as if resisting some one, and crying—

"Don't. Don't. Go away, man. Mammy! Mr Walton!"

I took him in my arms, and kissed him, and laid him down again ; and he lay as still as if he had never moved. At the same moment, Thomas came again into the room.

"I am sorry to be so troublesome, sir," he said; "but my poor daughter says there is one thing more she wanted to say to you."

I returned at once. As soon as I entered the room, she said eagerly:—

"I forgive him—I forgive him with all my heart ; but don't let him take Gerard."

I assured her I would do my best to prevent any such attempt on his part, and making her promise to try to go to sleep, left her once more. Nor was either of the patients disturbed again during the night. Both slept, as it appeared, refreshingly.

In the morning, that is, before eight o'clock, the old doctor made his welcome appearance, and pronounced both quite as well as he had

expected to find them. In another hour, he had sent young Tom to take my place, and my sister to take his father's. I was determined that none of the gossips of the village should go near the invalid if I could help it; for, though such might be kind-hearted and estimable women, their place was not by such a couch as that of Catherine Weir. I enjoined my sister to be very gentle in her approaches to her, to be careful even not to seem anxious to serve her, and so to allow her to get gradually accustomed to her presence, not showing herself for the first day more than she could help, and yet taking good care she should have everything she wanted. Martha seemed to understand me perfectly; and I left her in charge with the more confidence that I knew Dr Duncan would call several times in the course of the day. As for Tom, I had equal assurance that he would attend to orders; and as Gerard was very fond of him, I dismissed all anxiety about both, and

allowed my mind to return with fresh avidity to the contemplation of its own cares, and fears, and perplexities.

It was of no use trying to go to sleep, so I set out for a walk.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN AND THE CHILD.

IT was a fine frosty morning, the invigorating influences of which, acting along with the excitement following immediately upon a sleepless night, overcame in a great measure the depression occasioned by the contemplation of my circumstances. Disinclined notwithstanding for any more pleasant prospect, I sought the rugged common where I had so lately met Catherine Weir in the storm and darkness, and where I had stood without knowing it upon the very verge of the precipice down

which my fate was now threatening to hurl me. I reached the same chasm in which I had sought a breathing space on that night, and turning into it, sat down upon a block of sand which the frost had detached from the wall above. And now the tumult began again in my mind, revolving around the vortex of a new centre of difficulty.

For, first of all, I found my mind relieved by the fact that, having urged Catherine to a line of conduct which had resulted in confession—a confession which, leaving all other considerations of my office out of view, had the greater claim upon my secrecy that it was made in confidence in my uncovenanted honour,—I was not, could not be at liberty to disclose the secret she confided to me, which, disclosed by herself, would have been the revenge from which I had warned her, and at the same time my deliverance. I was relieved I say at first, by this view of the matter, because I might thus keep

my own chance of some favourable turn; whereas, if I once told Miss Oldcastle, I must give her up for ever, as I had plainly seen in the watch of the preceding night. But my love did not long remain skulking thus behind the hedge of honour. Suddenly I woke and saw that I was unworthy of the honour of loving her, for that I was glad to be compelled to risk her well-being for the chance of my own happiness; a risk which involved infinitely more wretchedness to her than the loss of my dearest hopes to me; for it is one thing for a man not to marry the woman he loves, and quite another for a woman to marry a man she cannot even respect. Had I not been withheld partly by my obligation to Catherine, partly by the feeling that I ought to wait and see what God would do, I should have risen that moment and gone straight to Oldcastle Hall, that I might plunge at once into the ocean of my loss, and encounter, with the full sense of

honourable degradation, every misconstruction that might justly be devised of my conduct. For that I had given her up first could never be known even to her in this world. I could only save her by encountering and enduring and cherishing her scorn. At least so it seemed to me at the time; and, although I am certain the other higher motives had much to do in holding me back, I am equally certain that this awful vision of the irrevocable fate to follow upon the deed, had great influence, as well, in inclining me to suspend action.

I was still sitting in the hollow, when I heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the distance, and felt a foreboding of what would appear. I was only a few yards from the road upon which the sand-cleft opened, and could see a space of it sufficient to show the persons even of rapid riders. The sounds drew nearer. I could distinguish the step of a pony and the

steps of two horses besides. Up they came and swept past—Miss Oldcastle upon Judy's pony, and Mr Stoddart upon her horse, with the captain upon his own. How grateful I felt to Mr Stoddart! And the hope arose in me that he had accompanied them at Miss Oldcastle's request.

I had had no fear of being seen, sitting as I was on the side from which they came. One of the three, however, caught a glimpse of me, and even in the moment ere she vanished I fancied I saw the lily-white grow rosy-red. But it must have been fancy, for she could hardly have been quite pale upon horseback on such a keen morning.

I could not sit any longer. As soon as I ceased to hear the sound of their progress, I rose and walked home—much quieter in heart and mind than when I set out.

As I entered by the nearer gate of the vicarage, I saw old Rogers enter by the far-

ther. He did not see me, but we met at the door. I greeted him.

"I'm in luck," he said, "to meet yer reverence just coming home. How's poor Miss Weir to-day, sir?"

"She was rather better, when I left her this morning, than she had been through the night. I have not heard since. I left my sister with her. I greatly doubt if she will ever get up again. That's between ourselves, you know. Come in."

"Thank you, sir. I wanted to have a little talk with you.—You don't believe what they say—that she tried to kill the poor little fellow?" he asked, as soon as the study door was closed behind us.

"If she did, she was out of her mind for the moment. But I don't believe it."

And thereupon I told him what both his master and I thought about it. But I did not tell him what she had said confirmatory of our conclusions.

"That 's just what I came to myself, sir, turning the thing over in my old head. But there 's dreadful things done in the world, sir. There 's my daughter been a-telling of me——"

I was instantly breathless attention. What he chose to tell me I felt at liberty to hear, though I would not have listened to Jane herself.—I must here mention that she and Richard were not yet married, old Mr Brownrigg not having yet consented to any day his son wished to fix; and that she was, therefore, still in her place of attendance upon Miss Oldcastle.

"—— There 's been my daughter a-telling of me," said Rogers, "that the old lady up at the Hall there is tormenting the life out of that daughter of hers—she don't look much like hers, do she, sir?—wanting to make her marry a man of her choosing. I saw him go past o' horseback with her yesterday, and I didn't more than half like the looks on him.

He 's too like a fair-spoken captain I sailed with once, what was the hardest man I ever sailed with. His own way was everything, even after he saw it wouldn't do. Now, don't you think, sir, somebody or other ought to interfere? It 's as bad as murder that, and anybody has a right to do summat to perwent it."

"I don't know what can be done, Rogers. I *can't* interfere.

The old man was silent. Evidently he thought I might interfere if I pleased. I could see what he was thinking. Possibly his daughter had told him something more than he chose to communicate to me. I could not help suspecting the mode in which he judged I might interfere. But I could see no likelihood before me but that of confusion and precipitation. In a word, I had not a plain path to follow.

"Old Rogers," I said, "I can almost guess what you mean. But I am in more difficulty

with regard to what you suggest than I can easily explain to you. I need not tell you, however, that I will turn the whole matter over in my mind."

"The prey ought to be taken from the lion somehow, if it please God," returned the old man solemnly. "The poor young lady keeps up as well as she can before her mother; but Jane do say there 's a power o' crying done in her own room."

Partly to hide my emotion, partly with the sudden resolve to do something, if anything could be done, I said :—

"I will call on Mr Stoddart this evening. I may hear something from him to suggest a mode of action."

"I don't think you 'll get anything worth while from Mr Stoddart. He takes things a deal too easy like. He 'll be this man's man and that man's man both at oncet. I beg your pardon, sir. But *he* won't help us."

"That's all I can think of at present, though," I said; whereupon the man-of-war's man, with true breeding, rose at once, and took a kindly leave.

I was in the storm again. She suffering, resisting, and I standing aloof! But what could I do? She had repelled me—she would repel me. Were I to dare to speak, and so be refused, the separation would be final. She had said that the day might come when she would ask help from me: she had made no movement towards the request. I would gladly die to serve her—yea, more gladly far than live, if that service was to separate us. But what to do I could not see. Still, just to do something, even if a useless something, I would go and see Mr Stoddart that evening. I was sure to find him alone, for he never dined with the family, and I might possibly catch a glimpse of Miss Oldcastle.

I found little Gerard so much better, though

very weak, and his mother so quiet, notwithstanding great feverishness, that I might safely leave them to the care of Mary, who had quite recovered from her attack, and her brother Tom. So there was something off my mind for the present.

The heavens were glorious with stars,—Arcturus and his host, the Pleiades, Orion, and all those worlds that shine out when ours is dark; but I did not care for them. Let them shine: they could not shine into me. I tried with feeble effort to lift my eyes to Him who is above the stars, and yet holds the sea, yea, the sea of human thought and trouble, in the hollow of His hand. How much sustaining, although no conscious comforting, I got from that region

> "Where all men's prayers to Thee raised
> Return possessed of what they pray Thee,"

I cannot tell. It was not a time favourable to the analysis of feeling—still less of religious

feeling. But somehow things did seem a little more endurable before I reached the house.

I was passing across the hall, following the "white wolf" to Mr Stoddart's room, when the drawing-room door opened, and Miss Oldcastle came half out, but seeing me drew back instantly. A moment after, however, I heard the sound of her dress following us. Light as was her step, every footfall seemed to be upon my heart. I did not dare to look round, for dread of seeing her turn away from me. I felt like one under a spell, or in an endless dream; but gladly would I have walked on for ever in hope, with that silken vortex of sound following me. Soon, however, it ceased. She had turned aside in some other direction, and I passed on to Mr Stoddart's room.

He received me kindly, as he always did; but his smile flickered uneasily. He seemed in some trouble, and yet pleased to see me.

"I am glad you have taken to horseback,"

I said. "It gives me hope that you will be my companion sometimes when I make a round of my parish. I should like you to see some of our people. You would find more in them to interest you than perhaps you would expect."

I thus tried to seem at ease, as I was far from feeling.

"I am not so fond of riding as I used to be," returned Mr Stoddart.

"Did you like the Arab horses in India?"

"Yes, after I got used to their careless ways. That horse you must have seen me on the other day, is very nearly a pure Arab. He belongs to Captain Everard, and carries Miss Oldcastle beautifully. I was quite sorry to take him from her, but it was her own doing. She would have me go with her. I think I have lost much firmness since I was ill."

"If the loss of firmness means the increase of kindness, I do not think you will have

to lament it," I answered. "Does Captain Everard make a long stay?"

"He stays from day to day. I wish he would go. I don't know what to do. Mrs Oldcastle and he form one party in the house; Miss Oldcastle and Judy another; and each is trying to gain me over. I don't want to belong to either. If they would only let me alone!"

"What do they want of you, Mr Stoddart?"

"Mrs Oldcastle wants me to use my influence with Ethelwyn, to persuade her to behave differently to Captain Everard. The old lady has set her heart on their marriage, and Ethelwyn, though she dares not break with him, she is so much afraid of her mother, yet keeps him somehow at arm's length. Then Judy is always begging me to stand up for her aunt. But what's the use of my standing up for her if she won't stand up for herself; she never says a word to me about it herself. It's all

Judy's doing. How am I to know what she wants?"

"I thought you said just now she asked you to ride with her?"

"So she did, but nothing more. She did not even press it, only the tears came in her eyes when I refused, and I could not bear that; so I went against my will. I don't want to make enemies. I am sure I don't see why she should stand out. He 's a very good match in point of property and family too."

"Perhaps she does not like him?" I forced myself to say.

"Oh! I suppose not, or she would not be so troublesome. But she could arrange all that if she were inclined to be agreeable to her friends. After all I have done for her! Well, one must not look to be repaid for anything one does for others. I used to be very fond of her: I am getting quite tired of her miserable looks."

And what had this man done for her, then? He had, for his own amusement, taught her Hindostanee; he had given her some insight into the principles of mechanics, and he had roused in her some taste for the writings of the Mystics. But for all that regarded the dignity of her humanity and her womanhood, if she had had no teaching but what he gave her, her mind would have been merely "an unweeded garden that grows to seed." And now he complained that in return for his pains she would not submit to the degradation of marrying a man she did not love, in order to leave him in the enjoyment of his own lazy and cowardly peace. Really he was a worse man than I had thought him. Clearly he would not help to keep her in the right path, not even interfere to prevent her from being pushed into the wrong one. But perhaps he was only expressing his own discomfort, not

giving his real judgment, and I might be censuring him too hardly.

"What will be the result, do you suppose?" I asked.

"I can't tell. Sooner or later she will have to give in to her mother. Everybody does. She might as well yield with a good grace."

"She must do what she thinks right," I said. "And you, Mr Stoddart, ought to help her to do what is right. You surely would not urge her to marry a man she did not love."

"Well, no; not exactly urge her. And yet society does not object to it. It is an acknowledged arrangement, common enough."

"Society is scarcely an interpreter of the divine will. Society will honour vile things enough, so long as the doer has money sufficient to clothe them in a grace not their own. There is a God's-way of doing everything in the world, up to marrying, or down to paying a bill."

"Yes, yes. I know what you would say; and I suppose you are right. I will not urge any opinion of mine. Besides, we shall have a little respite soon, for he must join his regiment in a day or two."

It was some relief to hear this. But I could not with equanimity prosecute a conversation having Miss Oldcastle for the subject of it, and presently took my leave.

As I walked through one of the long passages, but dimly lighted, leading from Mr Stoddart's apartment to the great staircase, I started at a light touch on my arm. It was from Judy's hand.

"Dear Mr Walton——" she said, and stopped.

For at the same moment appeared at the farther end of the passage towards which I had been advancing, a figure of which little more than a white face was visible; and the voice of Sarah, through whose softness always

ran a harsh thread that made it unmistakable, said,

"Miss Judy, your grandmamma wants you."

Judy took her hand from my arm, and with an almost martial stride the little creature walked up to the speaker, and stood before her defiantly. I could see them quite well in the fuller light at the end of the passage, where there stood a lamp. I followed slowly that I might not interrupt the child's behaviour, which moved me strangely in contrast with the pusillanimity I had so lately witnessed in Mr Stoddart.

"Sarah," she said, "you know you are telling a lie. Grannie does *not* want me. You have *not* been in the dining-room since I left it one moment ago. Do you think, you *bad* woman, *I* am going to be afraid of you? I know you better than you think. Go away directly, or I will make you."

She stamped her little foot, and the "white

wolf" turned and walked away without a word.

If the mothers among my readers are shocked at the want of decorum in my friend Judy, I would just say, that valuable as propriety of demeanour is, truth of conduct is infinitely more precious. Glad should I be to think that the even tenor of my children's good manners could never be interrupted, except by such righteous indignation as carried Judy beyond the strict bounds of good breeding. Nor could I find it in my heart to rebuke her wherein she had been wrong. In the face of her courage and uprightness, the fault was so insignificant that it would have been giving it an altogether undue importance to allude to it at all, and might weaken her confidence in my sympathy with her rectitude, When I joined her she put her hand in mine, and so walked with me down the stair and out at the front door.

"You will take cold, Judy, going out like that," I said.

"I am in too great a passion to take cold," she answered. "But I have no time to talk about that creeping creature.—Auntie *doesn't* like Captain Everard; and grannie keeps insisting on it that she shall have him whether she likes him or not. Now do tell me what you think."

"I do not quite understand you, my child."

"I know auntie would like to know what you think. But I know she will never ask you herself. So *I* am asking you whether a lady ought to marry a gentleman she does not like, to please her mother."

"Certainly not, Judy. It is often wicked, and at best a mistake."

"Thank you, Mr Walton. I will tell her. She will be glad to hear that you say so, I know."

"Mind you tell her you asked me, Judy. I

should not like her to think I had been interfering, you know."

"Yes, yes; I know quite well. I will take care. Thank you. He's going to-morrow. Good night."

She bounded into the house again, and I walked away down the avenue. I saw and felt the stars now, for hope had come again in my heart, and I thanked the God of hope. "Our minds are small because they are faithless," I said to myself. "If we had faith in God, as our Lord tells us, our hearts would share in His greatness and peace. For we should not then be shut up in ourselves, but would walk abroad in Him." And with a light step and a light heart I went home.

CHAPTER V.

OLD MRS TOMKINS.

VERY severe weather came, and much sickness followed, chiefly amongst the poorer people, who can so ill keep out the cold. Yet some of my well-to-do parishioners were laid up likewise—amongst others Mr Boulderstone, who had an attack of pleurisy. I had grown quite attached to Mr Boulderstone by this time, not because he was what is called interesting, for he was not; not because he was clever, for he was not; not because he was well-read, for he was not; not

because he was possessed of influence in the parish, though he had that influence; but simply because he was true; he was what he appeared, felt what he professed, did what he said; appearing kind, and feeling and acting kindly. Such a man is rare and precious, were he as stupid as the Welsh giant in "Jack the Giant-Killer." I could never see Mr Boulderstone a mile off, but my heart felt the warmer for the sight. Even in his great pain he seemed to forget himself as he received me, and to gain comfort from my mere presence. I could not help regarding him as a child of heaven, to be treated with the more reverence that he had the less aid to his goodness from his slow understanding. It seemed to me that the angels might gather with reverence around such a man, to watch the gradual and tardy awakening of the intellect in one in whom the heart and the conscience had been awake from the first. The latter safe,

they at least would see well that there was no fear for the former. Intelligence is a consequence of love; nor is there any true intelligence without it.

But I could not help feeling keenly the contrast when I went from his warm, comfortable, well-defended chamber, in which every appliance that could alleviate suffering or aid recovery was at hand, like a castle well appointed with arms and engines against the inroads of winter and his yet colder ally Death, —when, I say, I went from his chamber to the cottage of the Tomkinses, and found it, as it were, lying open and bare to the enemy. What holes and cracks there were about the door, through which the fierce wind rushed at once into the room to attack the aged feet and hands and throats! There were no defences of three-fold draperies, and no soft carpet on the brick floor,—only a small rug which my sister had carried them laid down

before a weak-eyed little fire, that seemed to despair of making anything of it against the huge cold that beleaguered and invaded the place. True, we had had the little cottage patched up. The two Thomas Weirs had been at work upon it for a whole day and a half in the first of the cold weather this winter; but it was like putting the new cloth on the old garment, for fresh places had broken out, and although Mrs Tomkins had fought the cold well with what rags she could spare, and an old knife, yet such razor-edged winds are hard to keep out, and here she was now, lying in bed, and breathing hard, like the sore-pressed garrison which had retreated to its last defence, the keep of the castle. Poor old Tomkins sat shivering over the little fire.

"Come, come, Tomkins! this won't do," I said, as I caught up a broken shovel that would have let a lump as big as one's fist through a hole in the middle of it. "Why don't you

burn your coals in weather like this? Where do you keep them?"

It made my heart ache to see the little heap in a box hardly bigger than the chest of tea my sister brought from London with her. I threw half of it on the fire at once.

"Deary me, Mr Walton! you *are* wasteful, sir. The Lord never sent His good coals to be used that way."

"He did though, Tomkins," I answered. "And He 'll send you a little more this evening, after I get home. Keep yourself warm, man. This world's cold in winter, you know."

"Indeed, sir, I know that. And I 'm like to know it worse afore long. She 's going," he said, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb towards the bed where his wife lay.

I went to her. I had seen her several times within the last few weeks, but had observed nothing to make me consider her seriously ill.

I now saw at a glance that Tomkins was right. She had not long to live.

"I am sorry to see you suffering so much, Mrs Tomkins," I said.

"I don't suffer so wery much, sir; though to be sure it be hard to get the breath into my body, sir. And I do feel cold-like, sir."

"I 'm going home directly, and I 'll send you down another blanket. It 's much cólder to-day than it was yesterday."

"It 's not weather-cold, sir, wi' me. It 's grave-cold, sir. Blankets won't do me no good, sir. I can't get it out of my head how perishing cold I shall be when I 'm under the mould, sir; though I oughtn't to mind it when it 's the will o' God. It 's only till the resurrection, sir."

"But it 's not the will of God, Mrs Tomkins."

"Ain't it, sir? Sure I thought it was."

"You believe in Jesus Christ, don't you, Mrs Tomkins?"

"That I do, sir, with all my heart and soul."

"Well, He says that whosoever liveth and believeth in Him shall never die."

"But, you know, sir, everybody dies. I *must* die, and be laid in the churchyard, sir. And that's what I don't like."

"But I say that is all a mistake. *You* won't die. Your body will die, and be laid away out of sight; but you will be awake, alive, more alive than you are now, a great deal."

And here let me interrupt the conversation to remark upon the great mistake of teaching children that they have souls. The consequence is, that they think of their souls as of something which is not themselves. For what a man *has* cannot be himself. Hence, when they are told that their souls go to heaven, they think of their *selves* as lying in the grave. They ought to be taught that they have bodies; and that their bodies die; while they

themselves live on. Then they will not think, as old Mrs Tomkins did, that *they* will be laid in the grave. It is making altogether too much of the body, and is indicative of an evil tendency to materialism, that we talk as if we *possessed* souls, instead of *being* souls. We should teach our children to think no more of their bodies when dead than they do of their hair when it is cut off, or of their old clothes when they have done with them.

"Do you really think so, sir?"

"Indeed I do. I don't know anything about where you will be. But you will be with God —in your Father's house, you know. And that is enough, is it not?"

"Yes, surely, sir. But I wish you was to be there by the bedside of me when I was a-dyin'. I can't help bein' summat skeered at it. It don't come nat'ral to me, like. I ha' got used to this old bed here, cold as it has

been—many's the night—wi' my good man there by the side of me."

"Send for me, Mrs Tomkins, any moment, day or night, and I'll be with you directly."

"I think, sir, if I had a hold ov you i' the one hand, and my man there, the Lord bless him, i' the other, I could go comfortable."

"I'll come the minute you send for me—just to keep you in mind that a better friend than I am is holding you all the time, though you mayn't feel His hands. If it is some comfort to have hold of a human friend, think that a friend who is more than man, a divine friend, has a hold of you, who knows all your fears and pains, and sees how natural they are, and can just with a word, or a touch, or a look into your soul, keep them from going one hair's-breadth too far. He loves us up to all our need, just because we need it, and He is all love to give."

"But I can't help thinking, sir, that I wouldn't

be troublesome. He has such a deal to look after! And I don't see how He can think of everybody, at every minute, like. I don't mean that He will let anything go wrong. But He might forget an old body like me for a minute, like."

"You would need to be as wise as He is before you could see how He does it. But you must believe more than you can understand. It is only common sense to do so. Think how nonsensical it would be to suppose that one who could make everything, and keep the whole going as He does, shouldn't be able to help forgetting. It would be unreasonable to think that He must forget because you couldn't understand how He could remember. I think it is as hard for Him to forget anything as it is for us to remember everything; for forgetting comes of weakness, and from our not being finished yet, and He is all strength and all perfection."

"Then you think, sir, He never forgets anything?"

I knew by the trouble that gathered on the old woman's brow what kind of thought was passing through her mind. But I let her go on, thinking so to help her the better. She paused for one moment only, and then resumed —much interrupted by the shortness of her breathing.

"When I was brought to bed first," she said, "it was o' twins, sir. And oh! sir, it was *very* hard. As I said to my man after I got my head up a bit, 'Tomkins,' says I, 'you don't know what it is to have *two* on 'em cryin' and cryin', and you next to nothin' to give 'em; till their cryin' sticks to your brain, and ye hear 'em when they're fast asleep, one on each side o' you.' Well, sir, I'm ashamed to confess it even to you; and what the Lord can think of me, I don't know."

"I would rather confess to Him than to the

best friend I ever had," I said; "I am so sure that He will make every excuse for me that ought to be made. And a friend can't always do that. He can't know all about it. And you can't tell him all, because you don't know all yourself. He does."

"But I would like to tell *you*, sir. Would you believe it, sir, I wished 'em dead? Just to get the wailin' of them out o' my head, I wished 'em dead. In the court-yard o' the squire's house, where my Tomkins worked on the home-farm, there was an old draw-well. It wasn't used, and there was a lid to it, with a hole in it, through which you could put a good big stone. And Tomkins once took me to it, and, without tellin' me what it was, he put a stone in, and told me to hearken. And I hearkened, but I heard nothing, as I told him so. 'But,' says he, 'hearken, lass.' And in a little while there come a blast o' noise like from somewheres. 'What's that, Tomkins?'

I said. 'That 's the ston',' says he, 'a strikin' on the water down that there well.' And I turned sick at the thought of it. And it's down there that I wished the darlin's that God had sent me; for there they 'd be quiet."

"Mothers are often a little out of their minds at such times, Mrs Tomkins. And so were you."

"I don't know, sir. But I must tell you another thing. The Sunday afore that, the parson had been preachin' about 'Suffer little children,' you know, sir, 'to come unto me.' I suppose that was what put it in my head; but I fell asleep wi' nothin' else in my head but the cries o' the infants and the sound o' the ston' in the draw-well. And I dreamed that I had one o' them under each arm, cryin' dreadful, and was walkin' across the court the way to the draw-well; when all at once a man come up to me and held out his two hands, and said, 'Gie me my childer.' And

I was in a terrible fear. And I gave him first one and then the t'other, and he took them, and one laid its head on one shoulder of him, and t'other upon t'other, and they stopped their cryin', and fell fast asleep; and away he walked wi' them into the dark, and I saw him no more. And then I awoke cryin', I didn't know why. And I took my twins to me, and my breasts was full, if ye'll excuse me, sir. And my heart was as full o' love to them. And they hardly cried worth mentionin' again. But afore they was two year old, they both died o' the brown chytis, sir. And I think that He took them."

"He did take them, Mrs Tomkins; and you 'll see them again soon."

"But, if He never forgets anything——"

"I didn't say that. I think He can do what He pleases. And if He pleases to forget anything, then He can forget it. And I think that is what He does with our sins—that is,

after He has got them away from us, once we are clean from them altogether. It would be a dreadful thing if He forgot them before that, and left them sticking fast to us and defiling us. How then should we ever be made clean? —What else does the prophet Isaiah mean when he says, 'Thou hast cast my sins behind Thy back'? Is not that where He does not choose to see them any more? They are not pleasant to Him to think of any more than to us. It is as if He said—'I will not think of that any more, for my sister will never do it again,' and so He throws it behind His back."

"They *are* good words, sir. I could not bear Him to think of me and my sins both at once."

I could not help thinking of the words of Macbeth, "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself."

The old woman lay quiet after this, relieved in mind, though not in body, by the communi-

cation she had made with so much difficulty, and I hastened home to send some coals and other things, and then call upon Dr Duncan, lest he should not know that his patient was so much worse as I had found her.

From Dr Duncan's I went to see old Samuel Weir, who likewise was ailing. The bitter weather was telling chiefly upon the aged. I found him in bed, under the old embroidery. No one was in the room with him. He greeted me with a withered smile, sweet and true, although no flash of white teeth broke forth to light up the welcome of the aged head.

"Are you not lonely, Mr Weir?"

"No, sir. I don't know as ever I was less lonely. I've got my stick, you see, sir," he said, pointing to a thorn stick which lay beside him.

"I do not quite understand you," I returned, knowing that the old man's gently humorous sayings always meant something.

"You see, sir, when I want anything, I've only got to knock on the floor, and up comes my son out of the shop. And then again, when I knock at the door of the house up there, my Father opens it and looks out. So I have both my son on earth and my Father in heaven, and what can an old man want more?"

"What, indeed, could any one want more?"

"It's very strange," the old man resumed after a pause, "but as I lie here, after I've had my tea, and it is almost dark, I begin to feel as if I was a child again. They say old age is a second childhood; but before I grew so old, I used to think that meant only that a man was helpless and silly again, as he used to be when he was a child: I never thought it meant that a man felt like a child again, as light-hearted and untroubled as I do now."

"Well, I suspect that is not what people do mean when they say so. But I am very glad —you don't know how pleased it makes me

to hear that you feel so. I will hope to fare in the same way when my time comes."

"Indeed, I hope you will, sir; for I am main and happy. Just before you came in now, I had really forgotten that I was a toothless old man, and thought I was lying here waiting for my mother to come in and say good-night to me before I went to sleep. Wasn't that curious, when I never saw my mother, as I told you before, sir?"

"It was very curious."

"But I have no end of fancies. Only when I begin to think about it, I can always tell when they are fancies, and they never put me out. There's one I see often—a man down on his knees at that cupboard nigh the floor there, searching and searching for somewhat. And I wish he would just turn round his face once for a moment that I might see him. I have a notion always it's my own father."

"How do you account for that fancy, now, Mr Weir?"

"I 've often thought about it, sir, but I never could account for it. I 'm none willing to think it 's a ghost; for what 's the good of it? I 've turned out that cupboard over and over, and there 's nothing there I don't know."

"You 're not afraid of it, are you?"

"No, sir. Why should I be? I never did it no harm. And God can surely take care of me from all sorts."

My readers must not think anything is going to come out of this strange illusion of the old man's brain. I questioned him a little more about it, and came simply to the conclusion, that when he was a child he had found the door open and had wandered into the house, at the time uninhabited, had peeped in at the door of the same room where he now lay, and had actually seen a man in the position he described, half in the cupboard, searching for

something. His mind had kept the impression after the conscious memory had lost its hold of the circumstance, and now revived it under certain physical conditions. It was a glimpse out of one of the many stories which haunted the old mansion. But there he lay like a child, as he said, fearless even of such usurpations upon his senses.

I think instances of quiet un*self*conscious faith are more common than is generally supposed. Few have along with it the genial communicative impulse of old Samuel Weir, which gives the opportunity of seeing into their hidden world. He seemed to have been, and to have remained, a child, in the best sense of the word. He had never had much trouble with himself, for he was of a kindly, gentle, trusting nature; and his will had never been called upon to exercise any strong effort to enable him to walk in the straight path. Nor had his intellect, on the other hand, while

capable enough, ever been so active as to suggest difficulties to his faith, leaving him, even theoretically, far nearer the truth than those who start objections for their own sakes, liking to feel themselves in a position of supposed antagonism to the generally acknowledged sources of illumination. For faith is in itself a light that lightens even the intellect; and hence the shield of the complete soldier of God, the shield of faith, is represented by Spenser as "framed all of diamond, perfect, pure, and clean," (the power of the diamond to absorb and again radiate light being no poetic fiction, but a well-known scientific fact,) whose light falling upon any enchantment or false appearance, destroys it utterly: for

> "all that was not such as seemed in sight,
> Before that shield did fade, and suddaine fall."

Old Rogers had passed through a very much larger experience. Many more difficulties had come to him, and he had met them in his own

fashion and overcome them. For while there is such a thing as truth, the mind that can honestly beget a difficulty must at the same time be capable of receiving that light of the truth which annihilates the difficulty, or at least of receiving enough to enable it to foresee vaguely some solution, for a full perception of which the intellect may not be as yet competent. By every such victory old Rogers had enlarged his being, ever becoming more childlike and faithful; so that, while the childlikeness of Weir was the childlikeness of a child, that of Old Rogers was the childlikeness of a man, in which submission to God is not only a gladness, but a conscious will and choice. But as the safety of neither depended on his own feelings, but on the love of God who was working in him, we may well leave all such differences of nature and education to the care of Him who first made the men different, and then brought different conditions out of them.

The one thing is, whether we are letting God have His own way with us, following where He leads, learning the lessons He gives us.

I wished that Mr Stoddart had been with me during these two visits. Perhaps he might have seen that the education of life was a marvellous thing, and, even in the poorest intellectual results, far more full of poetry and wonder than the outcome of that constant watering with the watering-pot of self-education which, dissociated from the duties of life and the influences of his fellows, had made of him what he was. But I doubt if he would have seen it.

A week had elapsed from the night I had sat up with Gerard Weir, and his mother had not risen from her bed, nor did it seem likely she would ever rise again. On a Friday I went to see her, just as the darkness was beginning to gather. The fire of life was burn-

ing itself out fast. It glowed on her cheeks, it burned in her hands, it blazed in her eyes. But the fever had left her mind. That was cool, oh, so cool, now! Those fierce tropical storms of passion had passed away, and nothing of life was lost. Revenge had passed away, but revenge is of death, and deadly. Forgiveness had taken its place, and forgiveness is the giving, and so the receiving of life. Gerard, his dear little head starred with sticking-plaster, sat on her bed, looking as quietly happy as child could look, over a wooden horse with cylindrical body and jointless legs, covered with an eruption of red and black spots.—Is it the ignorance or the imagination of children that makes them so easily pleased with the merest hint at representation? I suspect the one helps the other towards that most desirable result, satisfaction. — But he dropped it when he saw me, in a way so abandoning that — comparing small things with

great—it called to my mind those lines of Milton :—

> "From his slack hand the garland wreathed for Eve,
> Down dropt, and all the faded roses shed."

The quiet child *flung* himself upon my neck, and the mother's face gleamed with pleasure.

"Dear boy!" I said, "I am very glad to see you so much better."

For this was the first time he had shown such a revival of energy. He had been quite sweet when he saw me, but, until this evening, listless.

"Yes," he said, "I am quite well now." And he put his hand up to his head.

"Does it ache?"

"Not much now. The doctor says I had a bad fall."

"So you had, my child. But you will soon be well again."

The mother's face was turned aside, yet I

could see one tear forcing its way from under her closed eyelid.

"Oh, I don't mind it," he answered. "Mammy is so kind to me! She lets me sit on her bed as long as I like."

"That *is* nice. But just run to auntie in the next room. I think your mammy would like to talk to me for a little while."

The child hurried off the bed, and ran with overflowing obedience.

"I can even think of *him* now," said the mother, "without going into a passion. I hope God will forgive him. *I* do. I think He will forgive me."

"Did you ever hear," I asked, "of Jesus refusing anybody that wanted kindness from Him? He wouldn't always do exactly what they asked Him, because that would sometimes be of no use, and sometimes would even be wrong; but He never pushed them away from Him, never repulsed their approach to Him.

For the sake of His disciples, He made the Syrophenician woman suffer a little while, but only to give her such praise afterwards and such a granting of her prayer as is just wonderful."

She said nothing for a little while; then murmured,

"Shall I have to be ashamed to all eternity? I do not want not to be ashamed; but shall I never be able to be like other people—in heaven I mean?"

"If He is satisfied with you, you need not think anything more about yourself. If He lets you once kiss His feet, you won't care to think about other people's opinion of you even in heaven. But things will go very differently there from here. For everybody there will be more or less ashamed of himself, and will think worse of himself than he does of any one else. If trouble about your past life were to show itself on your face there, they would all

run to comfort you, trying to make the best of it, and telling you that you must think about yourself as He thinks about you; for what He thinks is the rule, because it is the infallible right way. But perhaps rather, they would tell you to leave that to Him who has taken away our sins, and not trouble yourself any more about it. But to tell the truth, I don't think such thoughts will come to you at all when once you have seen the face of Jesus Christ. You will be so filled with His glory and goodness and grace, that you will just live in Him and not in yourself at all."

"Will He let us tell Him anything we please?"

"He lets you do that now: surely He will not be less our God, our friend there."

"Oh, I don't mind how soon He takes me now! Only there's that poor child that I've behaved so badly to! I wish I could take

him with me. I have no time to make it up to him here."

"You must wait till he comes. He won't think hardly of you. There's no fear of that."

"What will become of him, though? I can't bear the idea of burdening my father with him."

"Your father will be glad to have him, I know. He will feel it a privilege to do something for your sake. But the boy will do him good. If he does not want him, I will take him myself."

"Oh! thank you, thank you, sir."

A burst of tears followed.

"He has often done me good," I said.

"Who, sir? My father?"

"No. Your son."

"I don't quite understand what you mean, sir."

"I mean just what I say. The words and

behaviour of your lovely boy have both roused and comforted my heart again and again."

She burst again into tears.

"That is good to hear. To think of your saying that! The poor little innocent! Then it isn't all punishment?"

"If it were *all* punishment, we should perish utterly. He is your punishment; but look in what a lovely loving form your punishment has come, and say whether God has been good to you or not."

"If I had only received my punishment humbly, things would have been very different now. But I do take it—at least I want to take it—just as He would have me take it. I will bear anything He likes. I suppose I must die?"

"I think He means you to die now. You are ready for it now, I think. You have wanted to die for a long time; but you were not ready for it before."

"And now I want to live for my boy. But His will be done."

"Amen. There is no such prayer in the universe as that. It means everything best and most beautiful. Thy will, O God, evermore be done."

She lay silent. A tap came to the chamber-door. It was Mary, who nursed her sister and attended to the shop.

"If you please, sir, here's a little girl come to say that Mrs Tomkins is dying, and wants to see you."

"Then I must say good-night to you, Catherine. I will see you to-morrow morning. Think about old Mrs Tomkins; she's a good old soul; and when you find your heart drawn to her in the trouble of death, then lift it up to God for her, that He will please to comfort and support her, and make her happier than health—stronger than strength, taking off the old worn garment of her body, and putting

upon her the garment of salvation, which will be a grand new body, like that the Saviour had when He rose again."

"I will try. I will think about her."

For I thought this would be a help to prepare her for her own death. In thinking lovingly about others, we think healthily about ourselves. And the things she thought of for the comfort of Mrs Tomkins, would return to comfort herself in the prospect of her own end, when perhaps she might not be able to think them out for herself.

CHAPTER VI.

CALM AND STORM.

BUT of the two, Catherine had herself to go first. Again and again was I sent for to say farewell to Mrs Tomkins, and again and again I returned home leaving her asleep, and for the time better. But on a Saturday evening, as I sat by my vestry-fire, pondering on many things, and trying to make myself feel that they were as God saw them and not as they appeared to me, young Tom came to me with the news that his sister seemed much worse, and his father would be much obliged if I would go

and see her. I sent Tom on before, because I wished to follow alone.

It was a brilliant starry night; no moon, no clouds, no wind, nothing but stars. They seemed to lean down towards the earth, as I have seen them since in more southern regions. It was, indeed, a glorious night. That is, I knew it was; I did not feel that it was. For the death which I went to be near, came, with a strange sense of separation, between me and the nature around me. I felt as if nature knew nothing, felt nothing, meant nothing, did not belong to humanity at all; for here was death, and there shone the stars. I was wrong, as I knew afterwards.

I had had very little knowledge of the external shows of death. Strange as it may appear, I had never yet seen a fellow-creature pass beyond the call of his fellow-mortals. I had not even seen my father die. And the thought was oppressive to me. "To think,"

I said to myself, as I walked over the bridge to the village-street—"to think that the one moment the person is here, and the next—who shall say *where?* for we know nothing of the region beyond the grave! Not even our risen Lord thought fit to bring back from Hades any news for the human family standing straining their eyes after their brothers and sisters that have vanished in the dark. Surely it is well, all well, although we know nothing, save that our Lord has been there, knows all about it, and does not choose to tell us. Welcome ignorance, then! the ignorance in which He chooses to leave us. I would rather not know, if He gave me my choice, but preferred that I should not know." And so the oppression passed from me, and I was free.

But little as I knew of the signs of the approach of death, I was certain, the moment I saw Catherine, that the veil that hid the

"silent land" had begun to lift slowly between her and it. And for a moment I almost envied her that she was so soon to see and know that after which our blindness and ignorance were wondering and hungering. She could hardly speak. She looked more patient than calm. There was no light in the room but that of the fire, which flickered flashing and fading, now lighting up the troubled eye, and now letting a shadow of the coming repose fall gently over it. Thomas sat by the fire with the child on his knee, both looking fixedly into the glow. Gerard's natural mood was so quiet and earnest, that the solemnity about him did not oppress him. He looked as if he were present at some religious observance of which he felt more than he understood, and his childish peace was in no wise inharmonious with the awful silence of the coming change. He was no more disquieted at the presence of death than the stars were.

And this was the end of the lovely girl—to leave the fair world still young, because a selfish man had seen that she was fair! No time can change the relation of cause and effect. The poison that operates ever so slowly is yet poison, and yet slays. And that man was now murdering her, with weapon long-reaching from out of the past. But no, thank God! this was not the end of her. Though there is woe for that man by whom the offence cometh, yet there is provision for the offence. There is One who bringeth light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow, humility out of wrong. Back to the Father's house we go with the sorrows and sins which, instead of inheriting the earth, we gathered and heaped upon our weary shoulders, and a different Elder Brother from that angry one who would not receive the poor swine-humbled prodigal, takes the burden from our shoulders, and leads us into the presence of the Good.

She put out her hand feebly, let it lie in mine, looked as if she wanted me to sit down by her bedside, and when I did so, closed her eyes. She said nothing. Her father was too much troubled to meet me without showing the signs of his distress, and his was a nature that ever sought concealment for its emotion; therefore he sat still. But Gerard crept down from his knee, came to me, clambered up on mine, and laid his little hand upon his mother's, which I was holding. She opened her eyes, looked at the child, shut them again, and tears came out from between the closed lids.

"Has Gerard ever been baptized?" I asked her.

Her lips indicated a *no*.

"Then I will be his godfather. And that will be a pledge to you that I will never lose sight of him."

She pressed my hand, and the tears came faster.

Believing with all my heart that the dying should remember their dying Lord, and that the "Do this in remembrance of me" can never be better obeyed than when the partaker is about to pass, supported by the God of his faith, through the same darkness which lay before our Lord when He uttered the words and appointed the symbol, we kneeled, Thomas and I, and young Tom, who had by this time joined us with his sister Mary, around the bed, and partook with the dying woman of the signs of that death, wherein our Lord gave Himself entirely to us, to live by His death, and to the Father of us all in holiest sacrifice as the high-priest of us His people, leading us to the altar of a like self-abnegation. Upon what that bread and that wine mean, the sacrifice of our Lord, the whole world of humanity hangs. It is the redemption of men.

After she had received the holy Sacrament, she lay still as before. I heard her

murmur once, "Lord, I do not deserve it. But I do love Thee." And about two hours after, she quietly breathed her last. We all kneeled, and I thanked the Father of us aloud that He had taken her to Himself. Gerard had been fast asleep on his aunt's lap, and she had put him to bed a little before. Surely he slept a deeper sleep than his mother's; for had she not awaked even as she fell asleep?

When I came out once more, I knew better what the stars meant. They looked to me now as if they knew all about death, and therefore could not be sad to the eyes of men; as if that unsympathetic look they wore came from this, that they were made like the happy truth, and not like our fears.

But soon the solemn feeling of repose, the sense that the world and all its cares would thus pass into nothing, vanished in its turn. For a moment I had been, as it were, walking on the shore of the Eternal, where the tide of

time had left me in its retreat. Far away across the level sands I heard it moaning, but I stood on the firm ground of truth, and heeded it not. In a few moments more it was raving around me; it had carried me away from my rest, and I was filled with the noise of its cares.

For when I returned home, my sister told me that Old Rogers had called, and seemed concerned not to find me at home. He would have gone to find me, my sister said, had I been anywhere but by a deathbed. He would not leave any message, however, saying he would call in the morning.

I thought it better to go to his house. The stars were still shining as brightly as before, but a strong foreboding of trouble filled my mind, and once more the stars were far away, and lifted me no nearer to "Him who made the seven stars and Orion." When I examined myself, I could give no reason for my sudden

fearfulness, save this: that as I went to Catherine's house, I had passed Jane Rogers on her way to her father's, and having just greeted her, had gone on; but, as it now came back upon me, she had looked at me strangely—that is, with some significance in her face which conveyed nothing to me; and now her father had been to seek me: it must have something to do with Miss Oldcastle.

But when I came to the cottage, it was dark and still, and I could not bring myself to rouse the weary man from his bed. Indeed it was past eleven, as I found to my surprise on looking at my watch. So I turned and lingered by the old mill, and fell a pondering on the profusion of strength that rushed past the wheel away to the great sea, doing nothing. "Nature," I thought, "does not demand that power should always be force. Power itself must repose. He that believeth shall not make haste, says the Bible. But it needs strength

to be still. Is my faith not strong enough to be still?" I looked up to the heavens once more, and the quietness of the stars seemed to reproach me. "We are safe up here," they seemed to say: "we shine, fearless and confident, for the God who gave the primrose its rough leaves to hide it from the blast of uneven spring, hangs us in the awful hollows of space. We cannot fall out of His safety. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold! Who hath created these things—that bringeth out their host by number? He calleth them all by names. By the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power, not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob! and speakest, O Israel! my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?"

The night was very still; there was, I thought, no one awake within miles of me. The stars seemed to shine into me the divine reproach of those glorious words. "O my

God!" I cried, and fell on my knees by the mill-door.

What I tried to say more I will not say here. I *may* say that I cried to God. What I said to Him ought not, cannot be repeated to another.

When I opened my eyes I saw the door of the mill was open too, and there in the door, his white head glimmering, stood Old Rogers, with a look on his face as if he had just come down from the mount. I started to my feet, with that strange feeling of something like shame that seizes one at the very thought of other eyes than those of the Father. The old man came forward, and bowed his head with an unconscious expression of humble dignity, but would have passed me without speech, leaving the mill-door open behind him. I could not bear to part with him thus.

"Won't you speak to me, Rogers?" I said.

He turned at once with evident pleasure.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I was ashamed of having intruded on you, and I thought you would rather be left alone. I thought—I thought——" hesitated the old man, "that you might like to go into the mill, for the night's cold out o' doors."

"Thank you, Rogers. I won't now. I thought you had been in bed. How do you come to be out so late?"

"You see, sir, when I'm in any trouble, it's no use to go to bed. I can't sleep. I only keep the old 'oman wakin'. And the key o' the mill allus hangin' at the back o' my door, and knowin' it to be a good place to—to—shut the door in, I came out as soon as she was asleep; but I little thought to see you, sir."

"I came to find you, not thinking how the time went. Catherine Weir is gone home."

"I am right glad to hear it, poor woman.

And perhaps something will come out now that will help us."

"I do not quite understand you," I said, with hesitation.

But Rogers made no reply.

"I am sorry to hear you are in trouble to-night. Can I help you?" I resumed.

"If you can help yourself, sir, you can help me. But I have no right to say so. Only, if a pair of old eyes be not blind, a man may pray to God about anything he sees. I was prayin' hard about you in there, sir, while you was on your knees o' the other side o' the door."

I could partly guess what the old man meant, and I could not ask him for further explanation.

"What did you want to see me about?" I inquired.

He hesitated for a moment.

"I daresay it was very foolish of me, sir.

But I just wanted to tell you that—our Jane was down here from the Hall this arternoon——"

"I passed her on the bridge. Is she quite well?"

"Yes, yes, sir. You know that 's not the point."

The old man's tone seemed to reprove me for vain words, and I held my peace.

"The captain 's there again."

An icy spear seemed to pass through my heart. I could make no reply. The same moment a cold wind blew on me from the open door of the mill.

Although Lear was of course right when he said,

> "The tempest in my mind
> Doth from my senses take all feeling else
> Save what beats there,"

yet it is also true, that sometimes, in the midst of its greatest pain, the mind takes marvellous notice of the smallest things that

happen around it. This involves a law of which illustrations could be plentifully adduced from Shakespeare himself, namely, that the intellectual part of the mind can go on working with strange independence of the emotional.

From the door of the mill, as from a sepulchral cavern, blew a cold wind like the very breath of death upon me, just when that pang shot, in absolute pain, through my heart. For a wind had arisen from behind the mill, and we were in its shelter save where a window behind and the door beside me allowed free passage to the first of the coming storm.

I believe I turned away from the old man without a word. He made no attempt to detain me. Whether he went back into his closet, the old mill, sacred in the eyes of the Father who honours His children, even as the church wherein many prayers went up to Him, or turned homewards to his cottage and his

sleeping wife, I cannot tell. The first I remember after that cold wind is, that I was fighting with that wind, gathered even to a storm, upon the common where I had dealt so severely with her who had this very night gone into that region into which, as into a waveless sea, all the rivers of life rush and are silent. Is it the sea of death? No. The sea of life—a life too keen, too refined, for our senses to know it, and therefore we call it death—because we cannot lay hold upon it.

I will not dwell upon my thoughts as I wandered about over that waste. The wind had risen to a storm charged with fierce showers of stinging hail, which gave a look of gray wrath to the invisible wind as it swept slanting by, and then danced and scudded along the levels. The next point in that night of pain is when I found myself standing at the iron gate of Oldcastle Hall. I had left the common, passed my own house and the church,

crossed the river, walked through the village, and was restored to self-consciousness—that is, I knew that I was there—only when first I stood in the shelter of one of those great pillars and the monster on its top. Finding the gate open, for they were not precise about having it fastened, I pushed it and entered. The wind was roaring in the trees as I think I have never heard it roar since; for the hail clashed upon the bare branches and twigs, and mingled an unearthly hiss with the roar. In the midst of it the house stood like a tomb, dark, silent, without one dim light to show that sleep and not death ruled within. I could have fancied that there were no windows in it, that it stood, like an eyeless skull, in that gaunt forest of skeleton trees, empty and desolate, beaten by the ungenial hail, the dead rain of the country of death. I passed round to the other side, stepping gently lest some ear might be awake —as if any ear, even that of Judy's white wolf

could have heard the loudest step in such a storm. I heard the hailstones crush between my feet and the soft grass of the lawn, but I dared not stop to look up at the back of the house. I went on to the staircase in the rock, and by its rude steps, dangerous in the flapping of such storm-wings as swept about it that night, descended to the little grove below, around the deep-walled pool. Here the wind did not reach me. It roared overhead, but, save an occasional sigh, as if of sympathy with their suffering brethren abroad in the world, the hermits of this cell stood upright and still around the sleeping water. But my heart was a well in which a storm boiled and raged; and all that "pother o'er my head" was peace itself compared to what I felt. I sat down on the seat at the foot of a tree, where I had first seen Miss Oldcastle reading. And then I looked up to the house. Yes, there was a light there! It must be in her window. She then could

not rest any more than I. Sleep was driven from her eyes because she must wed the man she would not; while sleep was driven from mine because I could not marry the woman I would. Was that it? No. My heart acquitted me, in part at least, of thinking only of my own sorrow in the presence of her greater distress. Gladly would I have given her up for ever, without a hope, to redeem her from such a bondage. "But it would be to marry another some day," suggested the tormentor within. And then the storm, which had a little abated, broke out afresh in my soul. But before I rose from her seat I was ready even for that—at least I thought so—if only I might deliver her from the all but destruction that seemed to be impending over her. The same moment in which my mind seemed to have arrived at the possibility of such a resolution, I rose almost involuntarily, and glancing once more at the dull light in her

window—for I did not doubt that it was her window, though it was much too dark to discern the shape of the house—almost felt my way to the stair, and climbed again into the storm.

But I was quieter now, and able to go home. It must have been nearly morning, though at this season of the year the morning is undefined, when I reached my own house. My sister had gone to bed, for I could always let myself in; nor, indeed, did any one in Marshmallows think the locking of the door at night an imperative duty.

When I fell asleep, I was again in the old quarry, staring into the deep well. I thought Mrs Oldcastle was murdering her daughter in the house above, while I was spell-bound to the spot, where, if I stood long enough, I should see her body float into the well from the subterranean passage, the opening of which was just below where I stood. I was thus

confusing and reconstructing the two dreadful stories of the place—that told me by old Weir, about the circumstances of his birth; and that told me by Dr Duncan, about Mrs Oldcastle's treatment of her elder daughter. But as a white hand and arm appeared in the water below me, sorrow and pity more than horror broke the bonds of sleep, and I awoke to less trouble than that of my dreams, only because that which I feared had not yet come.

CHAPTER VII.

A SERMON TO MYSELF.

IT was the Sabbath morn. But such a Sabbath! The day seemed all wan with weeping, and gray with care. The wind dashed itself against the casement, laden with soft heavy sleet. The ground, the bushes, the very outhouses seemed sodden with the rain. The trees, which looked stricken as if they could die of grief, were yet tormented with fear, for the bare branches went streaming out in the torrent of the wind, as cowering before the invisible foe. The first thing I knew when I awoke was the raving of that

wind. I could lie in bed not a moment longer. I could not rest. But how was I to do the work of my office? When a man's duty looks like an enemy, dragging him into the dark mountains, he has no less to go with it than when, like a friend with loving face, it offers to lead him along green pastures by the river-side. I had little power over my feelings; I could not prevent my mind from mirroring itself in the nature around me; but I could address myself to the work I had to do. "My God!" was all the prayer I could pray ere I descended to join my sister at the breakfast table. But He knew what lay behind the one word.

Martha could not help seeing that something was the matter. I saw by her looks that she could read so much in mine. But her eyes alone questioned me, and that only by glancing at me anxiously from time to time. I was grateful to her for saying no-

thing. It is a fine thing in friendship to know when to be silent.

The prayers were before me, in the hands of all my friends, and in the hearts of some of them; and if I could not enter into them as I would, I could yet read them humbly before God as His servant to help the people to worship as one flock. But how was I to preach? I had been in difficulty before now, but never in so much. How was I to teach others, whose mind was one confusion? The subject on which I was pondering when young Weir came to tell me his sister was dying, had retreated as if into the far past; it seemed as if years had come between that time and this, though but one black night had rolled by. To attempt to speak upon that would have been vain, for I had nothing to say on the matter now. And if I could have recalled my former thoughts, I should have felt a hypocrite as I delivered them, so utterly dissociated would they have

been from anything that I was thinking or feeling now. Here would have been my visible form and audible voice, uttering that as present to me now, as felt by me now, which I did think and feel yesterday, but which, although I believed it, was not present to my feeling or heart, and must wait the revolution of months, or it might be of years, before I should feel it again, before I should be able to exhort my people about it with the fervour of a present faith. But, indeed, I could not even recall what I had thought and felt. Should I then tell them that I could not speak to them that morning? — There would be nothing wrong in that. But I felt ashamed of yielding to personal trouble when the truths of God were all about me, although I could not feel them. Might not some hungry soul go away without being satisfied, because I was faint and down-hearted? I confess I had a desire likewise to avoid giving rise to specu-

lation and talk about myself, a desire which, although not wrong, could neither have strengthened me to speak the truth, nor have justified me in making the attempt.—What was to be done?

All at once the remembrance crossed my mind of a sermon I had preached before upon the words of St Paul: "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" a subject suggested by the fact that on the preceding Sunday I had especially felt, in preaching to my people, that I was exhorting myself whose necessity was greater than theirs —at least I felt it to be greater than I could know theirs to be. And now the converse of the thought came to me, and I said to myself: "Might I not try the other way now, and preach to myself? In teaching myself, might I not teach others? Would it not hold? I am very troubled and faithless now. If I knew that God was going to lay the full

weight of this grief upon me, yet if I loved Him with all my heart, should I not at least be more quiet? There would not be a storm within me then, as if the Father had descended from the throne of the heavens, and 'chaos were come again.' Let me expostulate with myself in my heart, and the words of my expostulation will not be the less true with my people."

All this passed through my mind as I sat in my study after breakfast, with the great old cedar roaring before my window. It was within an hour of church-time. I took my Bible, read and thought, got even some comfort already, and found myself in my vestry not quite unwilling to read the prayers and speak to my people.

There were very few present. The day was one of the worst — violently stormy, which harmonized somewhat with my feelings; and, to my further relief, the Hall pew was empty. Instead of finding myself a mere minister to

the prayers of others, I found, as I read, that my heart went out in crying to God for the divine presence of His spirit. And if I thought more of myself in my prayers than was well, yet as soon as I was converted, would I not strengthen my brethren? And the sermon I preached to myself and through myself to my people, was that which the stars had preached to me, and thereby driven me to my knees by the mill-door. I took for my text, "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed;" and then I proceeded to show them how the glory of the Lord was to be revealed. I preached to myself that throughout this fortieth chapter of the prophecies of Isaiah, the power of God is put side by side with the weakness of men, not that He, the perfect, may glory over His feeble children; not that He may say to them—"Look how mighty I am, and go down upon your knees and worship" —for power alone was never yet worthy of

prayer; but that He may say thus: "Look, my children, you will never be strong but with *my* strength. I have no other to give you. And that you can get only by trusting in me. I cannot give it you any other way. There is no other way. But can you not trust in me? Look how strong I am. You wither like the grass. Do not fear. Let the grass wither. Lay hold of my word, that which I say to you out of my truth, and that will be life in you that the blowing of the wind that withers cannot reach. I am coming with my strong hand and my judging arm to do my work. And what is the work of my strong hand and ruling arm? To feed my flock like a shepherd, to gather the lambs with my arm, and carry them in my bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. I have measured the waters in the hollow of my hand, and held the mountains in my scales, to give each his due weight, and all the nations, so strong and

fearful in your eyes, are as nothing beside my strength and what I can do. Do not think of me as of an image that your hands can make, a thing you can choose to serve, and for which you can do things to win its favour. I am before and above the earth, and over your life, and your oppressors I will wither with my breath. I come to you with help. I need no worship from you. But I say love me, for love is life, and I love you. Look at the stars I have made. I know every one of them. Not one goes wrong, because I keep him right. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel—my way is *hid* from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God! I give *power* to the *faint*, and to them that have no might, plenty of strength."

"Thus," I went on to say, "God brings His strength to destroy our weakness by making us strong. This is a God indeed! Shall we not trust Him?"

I gave my people this paraphrase of the chapter, to help them to see the meanings which their familiarity with the words, and their non-familiarity with the modes of eastern thought, and the forms of eastern expression, would unite to prevent them from catching more than broken glimmerings of. And then I tried to show them that it was in the commonest troubles of life, as well as in the spiritual fears and perplexities that came upon them, that they were to trust in God; for God made the outside as well as the inside, and they altogether belonged to Him; and that when outside things, such as pain or loss of work, or difficulty in getting money, were referred to God and His will, they too straightway became spiritual affairs, for nothing in the world could any longer appear common or unclean to the man who saw God in everything. But I told them they must not be too anxious to be delivered from that which troubled them; but

they ought to be anxious to have the presence of God with them to support them, and make them able in patience to possess their souls; and so the trouble would work its end—the purification of their minds, that the light and gladness of God and all His earth, which the pure in heart and the meek alone could inherit, might shine in upon them. And then I repeated to them this portion of a prayer out of one of Sir Philip Sidney's books:—

"O Lord, I yield unto Thy will, and joyfully embrace what sorrow Thou wilt have me suffer. Only thus much let me crave of Thee, (let my craving, O Lord, be accepted of Thee, since even that proceeds from Thee,) let me crave, even by the noblest title, which in my greatest affliction I may give myself, that I am Thy creature, and by Thy goodness (which is Thyself) that Thou wilt suffer some beam of Thy majesty so to shine into my

mind, that it may still depend confidently on Thee."

All the time I was speaking, the rain, mingled with sleet, was dashing against the windows, and the wind was howling over the graves all about. But the dead were not troubled by the storm; and over my head, from beam to beam of the roof, now resting on one, now flitting to another, a sparrow kept flying, which had taken refuge in the church till the storm should cease and the sun shine out in the great temple. "This," I said aloud, "is what the church is for: as the sparrow finds there a house from the storm, so the human heart escapes thither to hear the still small voice of God when its faith is too weak to find Him in the storm, and in the sorrow, and in the pain." And while I spoke, a dim watery gleam fell on the chancel-floor, and the comfort of the sun

awoke in my heart. Nor let any one call me superstitious for taking that pale sun-ray of hope as sent to me; for I received it as comfort for the race, and for me as one of the family, even as the bow that was set in the cloud, a promise to the eyes of light for them that sit in darkness. As I write, my eye falls upon the Bible on the table by my side, and I read the words, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory." And I lift my eyes from my paper and look abroad from my window, and the sun is shining in its strength. The leaves are dancing in the light wind that gives them each its share of the sun, and my trouble has passed away for ever, like the storm of that night and the unrest of that strange Sabbath.

Such comforts would come to us oftener from Nature, if we really believed that our God was the God of Nature; that when He made, or rather when He makes, He means; that not

His hands only, but His heart too, is in the making of those things; that, therefore, the influences of Nature upon human minds and hearts are because He intended them. And if we believe that our God is everywhere, why should we not think Him present even in the coincidences that sometimes seem so strange? For, if He be in the things that coincide, He must be in the coincidence of those things.

Miss Oldcastle told me once that she could not take her eyes off a butterfly which was flitting about in the church all the time I was speaking of the resurrection of the dead. I told the people that in Greek there was one word for the soul and for a butterfly—*Psyche;* that I thought as the light on the rain made the natural symbol of mercy—the rainbow, so the butterfly was the type in nature, and made to the end, amongst other ends, of being such a type—of the resurrection of the human body; that its name certainly expressed the

hope of the Greeks in immortality, while to us it speaks likewise of a glorified body, whereby we shall know and love each other with our eyes as well as our hearts.—My sister saw the butterfly too, but only remembered that she had seen it when it was mentioned in her hearing: on her the sight made no impression; she saw no coincidence.

I descended from the pulpit comforted by the sermon I had preached to myself. But I was glad to feel justified in telling my people that, in consequence of the continued storm, for there had been no more of sunshine than just that watery gleam, there would be no service in the afternoon, and that I would instead visit some of my sick poor, whom the weather might have discomposed in their worn dwellings.

The people were very slow in dispersing. There was so much putting on of clogs, gathering up of skirts over the head, and expanding

of umbrellas, soon to be taken down again as worse than useless in the violence of the wind, that the porches were crowded, and the few left in the church detained till the others made way. I lingered with these. They were all poor people.

"I am sorry you will have such a wet walk home," I said to Mrs Baird, the wife of old Reginald Baird, the shoemaker, a little wizened creature, with more wrinkles than hairs, who the older and more withered she grew, seemed like the kernels of some nuts only to grow the sweeter.

"It's very good of you to let us off this afternoon, sir. Not as I minds the wet: it finds out the holes in people's shoes, and gets my husband into more work."

This was, in fact, the response of the shoemaker's wife to my sermon. If we look for responses after our fashion instead of after people's own fashion, we ought to be disap-

pointed. Any recognition of truth, whatever form it may take, whether that of poetic delight, intellectual corroboration, practical common-place, or even vulgar aphorism, must be welcomed by the husbandmen of the God of growth. A response which jars against the peculiar pitch of our mental instrument, must not therefore be turned away from with dislike. Our mood of the moment is not that by which the universe is tuned into its harmonies. We must drop our instrument and listen to the other, and if we find that the player upon it is breathing after a higher expression; is, after his fashion, striving to embody something he sees of the same truth the utterance of which called forth this his answer, let us thank God and take courage. God at least is pleased: and if our refinement and education take away from our pleasure, it is because of something low, false, and selfish, not divine in a word, that is mingled with that refine-

ment and that education. If the shoemaker's wife's response to the prophet's grand poem about the care of God over His creatures, took the form of acknowledgment for the rain that found out the holes in the people's shoes, it was the more genuine and true, for in itself it afforded proof that it was not a mere reflex of the words of the prophet, but sprung from the experience and recognition of the shoemaker's wife. Nor was there anything necessarily selfish in it, for if there are holes in people's shoes, the sooner they are found out the better.

While I was talking to Mrs Baird, Mr Stoddart, whose love for the old organ had been stronger than his dislike to the storm, had come down into the church, and now approached me.

"I never saw you in the church before, Mr Stoddart," I said, "though I have heard you often enough. You use your own private door always."

"I thought to go that way now, but there came such a fierce burst of wind and rain in my face, that my courage failed me, and I turned back—like the sparrow—for refuge in the church."

"A thought strikes me," I said. "Come home with me, and have some lunch, and then we will go together to see some of my poor people. I have often wished to ask you."

His face fell.

"It is such a day!" he answered, remonstratingly, but not positively refusing. It was not his way ever to refuse anything positively.

"So it was when you set out this morning," I returned; "but you would not deprive us of the aid of your music for the sake of a charge of wind, and a rattle of rain-drops."

"But I shan't be of any use. You are going, and that is enough."

"I beg your pardon. Your very presence will be of use. Nothing yet given him or

done for him by his fellow, ever did any man so much good as the recognition of the brotherhood by the common signs of friendship and sympathy. The best good of given money depends on the degree to which it is the sign of that friendship and sympathy. Our Lord did not make little of visiting: 'I was sick, and ye visited me.' 'Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.' Of course, if the visitor goes professionally and not humanly,—as a mere religious policeman, that is—whether he only distributes tracts with condescending words, or gives money liberally because he thinks he ought, the more he does not go the better, for he only does harm to them and himself too."

"But I cannot pretend to feel any of the interest you consider essential: why then should I go?"

"To please me, your friend. That is a good human reason. You need not say a word—

you must not pretend anything. Go as my companion, not as their visitor. Will you come?"

"I suppose I must."

"You must, then. Thank you. You will help me. I have seldom a companion."

So when the storm-fit had abated for the moment, we hurried to the vicarage, had a good though hasty lunch, (to which I was pleased to see Mr Stoddart do justice; for it is with man as with beast, if you want work out of him, he must eat well—and it is the one justification of eating well, that a man works well upon it,) and set out for the village. The rain was worse than ever. There was no sleet, and the wind was not cold, but the windows of heaven were opened, and if the fountains of the great deep were not broken up, it looked like it, at least, when we reached the bridge and saw how the river had spread out over all the low lands on its bor-

ders. We could not talk much as we went along.

"Don't you find some pleasure in fighting the wind?" I said.

"I have no doubt I should," answered Mr Stoddart, "if I thought I were going to do any good; but as it is, to tell the truth, I would rather be by my own fire with my folio Dante on the reading desk."

"Well, I would rather help the poorest woman in creation, than contemplate the sufferings of the greatest and wickedest," I said.

"There are two things you forget," returned Mr Stoddart. "First, that the poem of Dante is not nearly occupied with the sufferings of the wicked; and next, that what I have complained of in this expedition—which, as far as I am concerned, I would call a wild-goose chase, were it not that it is your doing and not mine—is that I am not going to help anybody."

"You would have the best of the argument

entirely," I replied, "if your expectation was sure to turn out correct."

As I spoke, we had come within a few yards of the Tomkins's cottage, which lay low down from the village towards the river, and I saw that the water was at the threshold. I turned to Mr Stoddart, who, to do him justice, had not yet grumbled in the least.

"Perhaps you had better go home, after all," I said; "for you must wade into Tomkins's if you go at all. Poor old man! what can he be doing, with his wife dying, and the river in his house!"

"You have constituted yourself my superior officer, Mr Walton. I never turned my back on my leader yet. Though I confess I wish I could see the enemy a little clearer."

"There is the enemy," I said, pointing to the water, and walking into it.

Mr Stoddart followed me without a moment's hesitation.

When I opened the door, the first thing I saw was a small stream of water running straight from the door to the fire on the hearth, which it had already drowned. The old man was sitting by his wife's bedside. Life seemed rapidly going from the old woman. She lay breathing very hard.

"Oh, sir," said the old man, as he rose, almost crying, "you 're come at last!"

"Did you send for me?" I asked.

"No, sir. I had nobody to send. Leastways, I asked the Lord if He wouldn't fetch you. I been prayin' hard for you for the last hour. I couldn't leave her to come for you. And I do believe the wind 'ud ha' blown me off my two old legs."

"Well, I am come, you see. I would have come sooner, but I had no idea you would be flooded."

"It 's not that I mind, sir, though it *is* cold sin' the fire went. But she *is* goin' now, sir.

She ha'n't spoken a word this two hours and more, and her breathin's worse and worse. She don't know me now, sir."

A moan of protestation came from the dying woman.

"She does know you, and loves you too, Tomkins," I said. "And you'll both know each other better by and by."

The old woman made a feeble motion with her hand. I took it in mine. It was cold and deathlike. The rain was falling in large slow drops from the roof upon the bed-clothes. But she would be beyond the reach of all the region storms before long, and it did not matter much.

"Look if you can find a basin or plate, Mr Stoddart, and put it to catch the drop here," I said.

For I wanted to give him the first chance of being useful.

"There's one in the press there," said the old man, rising feebly.

"Keep your seat," said Mr Stoddart. "I 'll get it."

And he got a basin from the cupboard, and put it on the bed to catch the drop.

The old woman held my hand in hers; but by its motion I knew that she wanted something; and guessing what it was from what she had said before, I made her husband sit on the bed on the other side of her and take hold of her other hand, while I took his place on the chair by the bedside. This seemed to content her. So I went and whispered to Mr Stoddart, who had stood looking on disconsolately:—

"You heard me say I would visit some of my sick people this afternoon. Some will be expecting me with certainty. You must go instead of me, and tell them that I cannot come, because old Mrs Tomkins is dying; but I will see them soon."

He seemed rather relieved at the commis-

sion. I gave him the necessary directions to find the cottages, and he left me.

I may mention here that this was the beginning of a relation between Mr Stoddart and the poor of the parish—a very slight one indeed, at first, for it consisted only in his knowing two or three of them, so as to ask after their health when he met them, and give them an occasional half-crown. But it led to better things before many years had passed. It seems scarcely more than yesterday—though it is twenty years ago—that I came upon him in the avenue, standing in dismay over the fragments of a jug of soup which he had dropped, to the detriment of his trousers as well as the loss of his soup. "What am I to do?" he said. "Poor Jones expects his soup to-day."—"Why, go back and get some more."—"But what will cook say?" The poor man was more afraid of the cook than he would have been of a squadron of cavalry.

"Never mind the cook. Tell her you must have some more as soon as it can be got ready." He stood uncertain for a moment. Then his face brightened. "I will tell her I want my luncheon. I always have soup. And I'll get out through the greenhouse, and carry it to Jones."—"Very well," I said; "that will do capitally." And I went on, without caring to disturb my satisfaction by determining whether the devotion of his own soup arose more from love to Jones, or fear of the cook. He was a great help to me in the latter part of his life, especially after I lost good Dr Duncan, and my beloved friend Old Rogers. He was just one of those men who make excellent front-rank men, but are quite unfit for officers. He could do what he was told without flinching, but he always required to be told.

I resumed my seat by the bedside, where the old woman was again moaning. As soon

as I took her hand she ceased, and so I sat till it began to grow dark.

"Are you there, sir?" she would murmur.

"Yes, I am here. I have a hold of your hand."

"I can't feel you, sir."

"But you can hear me. And you can hear God's voice in your heart. I am here, though you can't feel me. And God is here, though you can't see Him."

She would be silent for a while, and then murmur again—

"Are you there, Tomkins?"

"Yes, my woman, I'm here," answered the old man to one of these questions; "but I wish I was there instead, wheresomever it be as you're goin', old girl."

And all that I could hear of her answer was, "Bym by; bym by."

Why should I linger over the death-bed of an illiterate woman, old and plain, dying away

by inches? Is it only that she died with a hold of my hand, and that therefore I am interested in the story? I trust not. I was interested in *her*. Why? Would my readers be more interested if I told them of the death of a young lovely creature, who said touching things, and died amidst a circle of friends, who felt that the very light of life was being taken away from them? It was enough for me that here was a woman with a heart like my own; who needed the same salvation I needed; to whom the love of God was the one blessed thing; who was passing through the same dark passage into the light that the Lord had passed through before her, that I had to pass through after her. She had no theories—at least, she gave utterance to none; she had few thoughts of her own—and gave still fewer of them expression; you might guess at a true notion in her mind, but an abstract idea she could scarcely lay hold of; her speech was

very common; her manner rather *brusque* than gentle; but she could love; she could forget herself; she could be sorry for what she did or thought wrong; she could hope; she could wish to be better; she could admire good people; she could trust in God her Saviour. And now the loving God-made human heart in her was going into a new school that it might begin a fresh beautiful growth. She was old, I have said, and plain; but now her old age and plainness were about to vanish, and all that had made her youth attractive to young Tomkins was about to return to her, only rendered tenfold more beautiful by the growth of fifty years of learning according to her ability. God has such patience in working us into vessels of honour! in teaching us to be children! And shall we find the human heart in which the germs of all that is noblest and loveliest and likest to God have begun to grow and manifest them-

selves uninteresting, because its circumstances have been narrow, bare, and poverty-stricken, though neither sordid nor unclean; because the woman is old and wrinkled and brown, as if these were more than the transient accidents of humanity; because she has neither learned grammar nor philosophy; because her habits have neither been delicate nor self-indulgent? To help the mind of such a woman to unfold to the recognition of the endless delights of truth; to watch the dawn of the rising intelligence upon the too still face, and the transfiguration of the whole form, as the gentle rusticity vanishes in yet gentler grace, is a labour and a delight worth the time and mind of an archangel. Our best living poet says—but no; I will not quote. It is a distinct wrong that befalls the best books to have many of their best words quoted till in their own place and connexion they cease to have force and influence. The meaning of the pas-

sage is that the communication of truth is one of the greatest delights the human heart can experience. Surely this is true. Does not the teaching of men form a great part of the divine gladness?

Therefore even the dull approaches of death are full of deep significance and warm interest to one who loves his fellows, who desires not to be distinguished by any better fate than theirs; and shrinks from the pride of supposing that his own death, or that of the noblest of the good, is more precious in the sight of God than that of "one of the least of these little ones."

At length, after a long silence, the peculiar sounds of obstructed breathing indicated the end at hand. The jaw fell, and the eyes were fixed. The old man closed the mouth and the eyes of his old companion, weeping like a child, and I prayed aloud, giving thanks to God for taking her to Himself. It went to

my heart to leave the old man alone with the dead; but it was better to let him be alone for a while, ere the women should come to do the last offices for the abandoned form.

I went to Old Rogers, told him the state in which I had left poor Tomkins, and asked him what was to be done.

"I 'll go and bring him home, sir, directly. He can't be left there."

"But how can you bring him in such a night?"

"Let me see, sir. I must think. Would your mare go in a cart, do you think?"

"Quite quietly. She brought a load of gravel from the common a few days ago. But where 's your cart? I haven't got one."

"There 's one at Weir's to be repaired, sir. It wouldn't be stealing to borrow it."

How he managed with Tomkins I do not know. I thought it better to leave all the rest to him. He only said afterwards, that he

could hardly get the old man away from the body. But when I went in next day, I found Tomkins sitting, disconsolate, but as comfortable as he could be, in the easy chair by the side of the fire. Mrs Rogers was bustling about cheerily. The storm had died in the night. The sun was shining. It was the first of the spring weather. The whole country was gleaming with water. But soon it would sink away, and the grass be the thicker for its rising.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COUNCIL OF FRIENDS.

MY reader will easily believe that I returned home that Sunday evening somewhat jaded, nor will he be surprised if I say that next morning I felt disinclined to leave my bed. I was able, however, to rise and go, as I have said, to Old Rogers's cottage.

But when I came home, I could no longer conceal from myself that I was in danger of a return of my last attack. I had been sitting for hours in wet clothes, with my boots full of water, and now I had to suffer for it. But as

I was not to blame in the matter, and had no choice offered me whether I should be wet or dry while I sat by the dying woman, I felt no depression at the prospect of the coming illness. Indeed, I was too much depressed from other causes, from mental strife and hopelessness, to care much whether I was well or ill. I could have welcomed death in the mood in which I sometimes found myself during the next few days, when I was unable to leave my bed, and knew that Captain Everard was at the Hall, and knew nothing besides. For no voice reached me from that quarter any more than if Oldcastle Hall had been a region beyond the grave. Miss Oldcastle seemed to have vanished from my ken as much as Catherine Weir and Mrs Tomkins—yes, more—for there was only death between these and me; whereas, there was something far worse—I could not always tell what—that rose ever between Miss Oldcastle and myself, and para-

lysed any effort I might fancy myself on the point of making for her rescue.

One pleasant thing happened. On the Thursday, I think it was, I felt better. My sister came into my room and said that Miss Crowther had called, and wanted to see me.

"Which Miss Crowther is it?" I asked.

"The little lady, that looks like a bird, and chirps when she talks."

Of course I was no longer in any doubt as to which of them it was.

"You told her I had a bad cold, did you not?"

"Oh, yes. But she says if it is only a cold, it will do you no harm to see her."

"But you told her I was in bed, didn't you?"

"Of course. But it makes no difference. She says she's used to seeing sick folk in bed; and if you don't mind seeing her, she doesn't mind seeing you."

"Well, I suppose I must see her," I said.

So my sister made me a little tidier, and introduced Miss Crowther.

"O dear Mr Walton, I am *so* sorry! But you're not very ill, are you?"

"I hope not, Miss Jemima. Indeed, I begin to think this morning that I am going to get off easier than I expected."

"I am glad of that. Now listen to me. I won't keep you, and it is a matter of some importance. I hear that one of your people is dead, a young woman of the name of Weir, who has left a little boy behind her. Now, I have been wanting for a long time to adopt a child——"

"But," I interrupted her, "what would Miss Hester say?"

"My sister is not so very dreadful as perhaps you think her, Mr Walton; and besides, when I do want my own way very particularly, which is not often, for there are not so

many things that it's worth while insisting upon—but when I *do* want my own way, I always have it. I then stand upon my right of—what do you call it?—primo—primogeniture—that's it! Well, I think I know something of this child's father. I am sorry to say I don't know much good of him, and that's the worse for the boy. Still——"

"The boy is an uncommonly sweet and lovable child, whoever was his father," I interposed.

"I am very glad to hear it. I am the more determined to adopt him. What friends has he?"

"He has a grandfather, and an uncle and aunt, and will have a godfather—that's me—in a few days, I hope."

"I am very glad to hear it. There will be no opposition on the part of the relatives, I presume?"

"I am not so sure of that. I fear I shall object for one, Miss Jemima."

"You? I didn't expect that of you, Mr Walton, I must say."

And there was a tremor in the old lady's voice more of disappointment and hurt than of anger.

"I will think it over, though, and talk about it to his grandfather, and we shall find out what's best, I do hope. You must not think I should not like you to have him."

"Thank you, Mr Walton. Then I won't stay longer now. But I warn you I will call again very soon, if you don't come to see me. Good morning."

And the dear old lady shook hands with me and left me rather hurriedly, turning at the door, however, to add—

"Mind, I've set my heart upon having the boy, Mr Walton. I've seen him often."

What could have made Miss Crowther take such a fancy to the boy? I could not help associating it with what I had heard of her

youthful disappointment, but never having had my conjectures confirmed, I will say no more about them. Of course I talked the matter over with Thomas Weir; but, as I had suspected, I found that he was now as unwilling to part with the boy as he had formerly disliked the sight of him. Nor did I press the matter at all, having a belief that the circumstances of one's natal position are not to be rudely handled or thoughtlessly altered, besides that I thought Thomas and his daughter ought to have all the comfort and good that were to be got from the presence of the boy whose advent had occasioned them so much trouble and sorrow, yea, and sin too. But I did not give a positive and final refusal to Miss Crowther. I only said "for the present;" for I did not feel at liberty to go further. I thought that such changes might take place as would render the trial of such a new relationship desirable; as, indeed, it turned out in the

end, though I cannot tell the story now, but must keep it for a possible future.

I have, I think, entirely as yet, followed, in these memoirs, the plan of relating either those things only at which I was present, or, if other things, only in the same mode in which I heard them. I will now depart from this plan—for once. Years passed before some of the following facts were reported to me, but it is only here that they could be interesting to my readers.

At the very time Miss Crowther was with me, as nearly as I can guess, Old Rogers turned into Thomas Weir's workshop. The usual, on the present occasion somewhat melancholy, greetings having passed between them, Old Rogers said—

"Don't you think, Mr Weir, there 's summat the matter wi' parson?"

"Overworked," returned Weir. "He 's lost two, ye see, and had to see them both safe over, as I may say, within the same day.

He 's got a bad cold, I 'm sorry to hear, besides. Have ye heard of him to-day ? "

" Yes, yes ; he 's badly, and in bed. But that 's not what I mean. There 's summat on his mind," said Old Rogers.

" Well, I don't think it 's for you or me to meddle with parson's mind," returned Weir.

" I 'm not so sure o' that," persisted Rogers. " But if I had thought, Mr Weir, as how you would be ready to take me up short for mentionin' of the thing, I wouldn't ha' opened my mouth to you about parson—leastways, in that way, I mean."

" But what way *do* you mean, Old Rogers ?"

" Why, about his in'ards, you know."

" I 'm no nearer your meanin' yet."

" Well, Mr Weir, you and me 's two old fellows, now—leastways I 'm a deal older than you. But that doesn't signify to what I want to say."

And here Old Rogers stuck fast—according to Weir's story.

"It don't seem easy to say no how, Old Rogers," said Weir.

"Well, it ain't. So I must just let it go by the run, and hope the parson, who'll never know, would forgive me if he did."

"Well, then, what is it?"

"It's my opinion that that parson o' ours—you see, we knows about it, Mr Weir, though we're not gentlefolks—leastways, I'm none."

"Now, what *do* you mean, Old Rogers?"

"Well, I means this—as how parson's in love. There, that's paid out."

"Suppose he was, I don't see yet what business that is of yours or mine either."

"Well, I do. I'd go to Davie Jones for that man."

A heathenish expression, perhaps; but Weir assured me, with much amusement in his tone, that those were the very words Old Rogers

used. Leaving the expression aside, will the reader think for a moment on the old man's reasoning? My condition *was* his business; for he was ready to die for me! Ah! love does indeed make us all each other's keeper, just as we were intended to be.

"But what *can* we do?" returned Weir.

Perhaps he was the less inclined to listen to the old man, that he was busy with a coffin for his daughter, who was lying dead down the street. And so my poor affairs were talked of over the coffin-planks. Well, well, it was no bad omen.

"I tell you what, Mr Weir, this here's a serious business. And it seems to me it's not shipshape o' you to go on with that plane o' yours, when we're talkin' about parson."

"Well, Old Rogers, I meant no offence. Here goes. *Now*, what have you to say? Though if it's offence to parson you're speakin' of, I know, if I were parson, who

I'd think was takin' the greatest liberty, me wi' my plane, or you wi' your fancies."

"Belay there, and hearken."

So Old Rogers went into as many particulars as he thought fit, to prove that his suspicion as to the state of my mind was correct; which particulars I do not care to lay in a collected form before my reader, he being in no need of such a summing up to give his verdict, seeing the parson has already pleaded guilty. When he had finished,

"Supposing all you say, Old Rogers," remarked Thomas, "I don't yet see what *we've* got to do with it. Parson ought to know best what he's about."

"But my daughter tells me," said Rogers, "that Miss Oldcastle has no mind to marry Captain Everard. And she thinks if parson would only speak out he might have a chance."

Weir made no reply, and was silent so long,

with his head bent, that Rogers grew impatient.

"Well, man, ha' you nothing to say now—not for your best friend—on earth, I mean—and that's parson? It may seem a small matter to you, but it's no small matter to parson."

"Small to me!" said Weir, and taking up his tool, a constant recourse with him when agitated, he began to plane furiously.

Old Rogers now saw that there was more in it than he had thought, and held his peace and waited. After a minute or two of fierce activity, Thomas lifted up a face more white than the deal-board he was planing, and said,

"You should have come to the point a little sooner, Old Rogers."

He then laid down his plane, and went out of the workshop, leaving Rogers standing there in bewilderment. But he was not gone many

minutes. He returned with a letter in his hand.

"There," he said, giving it to Rogers.

"I can't read hand o' write," returned Rogers. "I ha' enough ado with straight-foret print. But I'll take it to parson."

"On no account," returned Thomas, emphatically. "That's not what I gave it you for. Neither you nor parson has any right to read that letter; and I don't want either of you to read it. Can Jane read writing?"

"I don't know as she can, for, you see, what makes lasses take to writin' is when their young man's over the seas, leastways not in the mill over the brook."

"I'll be back in a minute," said Thomas, and taking the letter from Rogers's hand, he left the shop again.

He returned once more with the letter sealed up in an envelope, addressed to Miss Oldcastle.

"Now, you tell your Jane to give that to Miss Oldcastle from me—mind, from *me;* and she must give it into her own hands, and let no one else see it. And I must have it again. Mind you tell her all that, Old Rogers."

"I will. It's for Miss Oldcastle, and no one else to know on't. And you're to have it again all safe when done with."

"Yes. Can you trust Jane not to go talking about it?"

"I think I can. I ought to, anyhow. But she can't know anythink in the letter now, Mr Weir."

"I know that; but Marshmallows is a talkin' place. And poor Kate ain't right out o' hearin' yet.—You 'll come and see her buried to-morrow, won't ye, Old Rogers?"

"I will, Thomas. You've had a troubled life, but thank God the sun came out a bit before she died."

"That's true, Rogers. It's all right, I do

think, though I grumbled long and sore. But Jane mustn't speak of that letter."

"No. That she shan't."

"I'll tell you some day what's in it. But I can't bear to talk about it yet."

And so they parted.

I was too unwell still either to be able to bury my dead out of my sight or to comfort my living the next Sunday. I got help from Addicehead, however, and the dead bodies were laid aside in the ancient wardrobe of the tomb. They were both buried by my vestry-door, Catherine where I had found young Tom lying, namely, in the grave of her mother, and old Mrs Tomkins on the other side of the path.

On Sunday, Rogers gave his daughter the letter, and she carried it to the Hall. It was not till she had to wait on her mistress before leaving her for the night that she found an opportunity of giving it into her own hands.

Then when her bell rang, Jane went up to her room, and found her so pale and haggard that she was frightened. She had thrown herself back on the couch, with her hands lying by her sides, as if she cared for nothing in this world or out of it. But when Jane entered, she started and sat up, and tried to look like herself. Her face, however, was so pitiful, that honest-hearted Jane could not help crying, upon which the responsive sisterhood overcame the proud lady, and she cried too. Jane had all but forgotten the letter, of the import of which she had no idea, for her father had taken care to rouse no suspicions in her mind. But when she saw her cry, the longing to give her something, which comes to us all when we witness trouble—for giving seems to mean everything—brought to her mind the letter she had undertaken to deliver to her. Now she had no notion, as I have said, that the letter had anything to do

with her present perplexity, but she hoped it might divert her thoughts for a moment, which is all that love at a distance can look for sometimes.

"Here is a letter," said Jane, "that Mr Weir the carpenter gave to my father to give to me to bring to you, miss."

"What is it about, Jane?" she asked listlessly.

Then a sudden flash broke from her eyes, and she held out her hand eagerly to take it. She opened it and read it with changing colour, but when she had finished it, her cheeks were crimson, and her eyes glowing like fire.

"The wretch!" she said, and threw the letter from her into the middle of the floor.

Jane, who remembered the injunctions of her father as to the safety and return of the letter, stooped to pick it up; but had hardly raised herself when the door opened, and in

came Mrs Oldcastle. The moment she saw her mother, Ethelwyn rose, and advancing to meet her, said,

"Mother, I will *not* marry that man. You may do what you please with me, but I *will not.*"

"Heigho!" exclaimed Mrs Oldcastle with spread nostrils, and turning suddenly upon Jane, snatched the letter out of her hand.

She opened and read it, her face getting more still and stony as she read. Miss Oldcastle stood and looked at her mother with cheeks now pale but with still flashing eyes. The moment her mother had finished the letter, she walked swiftly to the fire, tearing the letter as she went, and thrust it between the bars, pushing it in fiercely with the poker, and muttering—

"A vile forgery of those low Chartist wretches! As if he would ever have looked at one of *their* women! A low conspiracy

to get money from a gentleman in his honourable position!"

And for the first time since she went to the Hall, Jane said, there was colour in that dead white face.

She turned once more, fiercer than ever, upon Jane, and in a tone of rage under powerful repression, began :—

"You leave the house—*this instant.*"

The last two words, notwithstanding her self-command, rose to a scream. And she came from the fire towards Jane, who stood trembling near the door, with such an expression on her countenance that absolute fear drove her from the room before she knew what she was about. The locking of the door behind her let her know that she had abandoned her young mistress to the madness of her mother's evil temper and disposition. But it was too late. She lingered by the door and listened, but beyond an occasional hoarse tone

of suppressed energy, she heard nothing. At length the lock as suddenly turned, and she was surprised by Mrs Oldcastle, if not in a listening attitude, at least where she had no right to be after the dismissal she had received.

Opposite Miss Oldcastle's bedroom was another, seldom used, the door of which was now standing open. Instead of speaking to Jane, Mrs Oldcastle gave her a violent push, which drove her into this room. Thereupon she shut the door and locked it. Jane spent the whole of the night in that room, in no small degree of trepidation as to what might happen next. But she heard no noise all the rest of the night, part of which, however, was spent in sound sleep, for Jane's conscience was in no ways disturbed as to any part she had played in the current events.

It was not till the morning that she examined the door, to see if she could not man-

age to get out and escape from the house, for she shared with the rest of the family an indescribable fear of Mrs Oldcastle and her confidante, the White Wolf. But she found it was of no use: the lock was at least as strong as the door. Being a sensible girl and self-possessed, as her parents' child ought to be, she made no noise, but waited patiently for what might come. At length, hearing a step in the passage, she tapped gently at the door and called, "Who 's there?" The cook's voice answered.

"Let me out," said Jane. "The door 's locked."

The cook tried, but found there was no key. Jane told her how she came there, and the cook promised to get her out as soon as she could. Meantime all she could do for her was to hand her a loaf of bread on a stick from the next window. It had been long dark before some one unlocked the door, and left

her at liberty to go where she pleased, of which she did not fail to make immediate use.

Unable to find her young mistress, she packed her box, and, leaving it behind her, escaped to her father. As soon as she had told him the story, he came straight to me.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEXT THING.

AS I sat in my study, in the twilight of that same day, the door was hurriedly opened, and Judy entered. She looked about the room with a quick glance to see that we were alone, then caught my hand in both of hers, and burst out crying.

"Why, Judy!" I said, "what *is* the matter?"

But the sobs would not allow her to answer. I was too frightened to put any more questions, and so stood silent—my chest feeling like an empty tomb that waited for death to fill it. At length with a strong effort she checked the succession of her sobs, and spoke.

"They are killing auntie. She looks like a ghost already," said the child, again bursting into tears.

"Tell me, Judy, what *can* I do for her?"

"You must find out, Mr Walton. If you loved her as much as I do, you would find out what to do."

"But she will not let me do anything for her."

"Yes, she will. She says you promised to help her some day."

"Did she send you, then?"

"No. She did not send me."

"Then how—what—what can I do?"

"Oh, you exact people! You must have everything square and in print before you move. If it had been me now, wouldn't I have been off like a shot! Do get your hat, Mr Walton."

"Come, then, Judy. I will go at once.—Shall I see her?"

And every vein throbbed at the thought of rescuing her from her persecutors, though I had not yet the smallest idea how it was to be effected.

"We will talk about that as we go," said Judy, authoritatively.

In a moment more we were in the open air. It was a still night, with an odour of damp earth, and a hint of green buds in it. A pale half-moon hung in the sky, now and then hidden by the clouds that swept across it, for there was wind in the heavens, though upon earth all was still. I offered Judy my arm, but she took my hand, and we walked on without a word till we had got through the village and out upon the road.

"Now, Judy," I said at last, "tell me what they are doing to your aunt?"

"I don't know what they are doing But I am sure she will die."

"Is she ill?"

"She is as white as a sheet, and will not leave her room. Grannie must have frightened her dreadfully. Everybody is frightened at her but me, and I begin to be frightened too. And what will become of auntie then?"

"But what can her mother do to her?"

"I don't know. I think it is her determination to have her own way that makes auntie afraid she will get it somehow; and she says now she will rather die than marry Captain Everard. Then there is no one allowed to wait on her but Sarah, and I know the very sight of her is enough to turn auntie sick almost. What has become of Jane I don't know. I haven't seen her all day, and the servants are whispering together more than usual. Auntie can't eat what Sarah brings her, I am sure; else I should almost fancy she was starving herself to death to keep clear of that Captain Everard."

"Is he still at the Hall?"

"Yes. But I don't think it is altogether his fault. Grannie won't let him go. I don't believe he knows how determined auntie is not to marry him. Only, to be sure, though grannie never lets her have more than five shillings in her pocket at a time, she will be worth something when she is married."

"Nothing can make her worth more than she is, Judy," I said, perhaps with some discontent in my tone.

"That's as you and I think, Mr Walton; not as grannie and the captain think at all. I daresay he would not care much more than grannie whether she was willing or not, so long as she married him."

"But, Judy, we must have some plan laid before we reach the Hall; else my coming will be of no use."

"Of course. I know how much I can do, and you must arrange the rest with her. I will take you to the little room up-stairs—we

call it the octagon. That you know is just under auntie's room. They will be at dinner —the captain and grannie. I will leave you there, and tell auntie that you want to see her."

"But, Judy,——"

"Don't you want to see her, Mr Walton?"

"Yes, I do; more than you can think."

"Then I will tell her so."

"But will she come to me?"

"I don't know. We have to find that out."

"Very well. I leave myself in your hands."

I was now perfectly collected. All my dubitation and distress were gone, for I had something to do, although what I could not yet tell. That she did not love Captain Everard was plain, and that she had as yet resisted her mother was also plain, though it was not equally certain that she would, if left at her mercy, go on to resist her. This was

what I hoped to strengthen her to do. I saw nothing more within my reach as yet. But from what I knew of Miss Oldcastle, I saw plainly enough that no greater good could be done for her than this enabling to resistance. Self-assertion was so foreign to her nature, that it needed a sense of duty to rouse her even to self-defence. As I have said before, she was clad in the mail of endurance, but was utterly without weapons. And there was a danger of her conduct and then of her mind giving way at last, from the gradual inroads of weakness upon the thews which she left unexercised. In respect of this, I prayed heartily that I might help her.

Judy and I scarcely spoke to each other from the moment we entered the gate till I found myself at a side door which I had never observed till now. It was fastened, and Judy told me to wait till she went in and opened it. The moon was now quite obscured, and I was

under no apprehension of discovery. While I stood there I could not help thinking of Dr Duncan's story, and reflecting that the daughter was now returning the kindness shown to the mother.

I had not to wait long before the door opened behind me noiselessly, and I stepped into the dark house. Judy took me by the hand, and led me along a passage, and then up a stair into the little drawing-room. There was no light. She led me to a seat at the farther end, and opening a door close beside me, left me in the dark.

There I sat so long that I fell into a fit of musing, broken ever by startled expectation. Castle after castle I built up; castle after castle fell to pieces in my hands. Still she did not come. At length I got so restless and excited that only the darkness kept me from starting up and pacing the room. Still she did not come, and partly from weakness,

partly from hope deferred, I found myself beginning to tremble all over. Nor could I control myself. As the trembling increased, I grew alarmed lest I should become unable to carry out all that might be necessary.

Suddenly from out of the dark a hand settled on my arm. I looked up and could just see the whiteness of a face. Before I could speak, a voice said brokenly, in a half-whisper :—

"*Will* you save me, Mr Walton? But you 're trembling ; you are ill ; you ought not to have come to me. I will get you something."

And she moved to go, but I held her. All my trembling was gone in a moment. Her words, so careful of me even in her deep misery, went to my heart and gave me strength. The suppressed feelings of many months rushed to my lips. What I said I do not know, but I know that I told her I

loved her. And I know that she did not draw her hand from mine when I said so.

But ere I ceased came a revulsion of feeling.

"Forgive me," I said, "I am selfishness itself to speak to you thus now, to take advantage of your misery to make you listen to mine. But, at least, it will make you sure that if all I am, all I have will save you——"

"But I am saved already," she interposed, "if you love me—for I love you."

And for some moments there were no words to speak. I stood holding her hand, conscious only of God and her. At last I said:

"There is no time now but for action. Nor do I see anything but to go with me at once. Will you come home to my sister? Or I will take you wherever you please."

"I will go with you anywhere you think best. Only take me away."

"Put on your bonnet, then, and a warm cloak, and we will settle all about it as we go."

She had scarcely left the room when Mrs Oldcastle came to the door.

"No lights here!" she said. "Sarah, bring candles, and tell Captain Everard, when he will join us, to come to the octagon room. Where can that little Judy be? The child gets more and more troublesome, I do think. I must take her in hand."

I had been in great perplexity how to let her know that I was there; for to announce yourself to a lady by a voice out of the darkness of her boudoir, or to wait for candles to discover you where she thought she was quite alone—neither is a pleasant way of presenting yourself to her consciousness. But I was helped out of the beginning into the middle of my difficulties, once more by that blessed little Judy. I did not know she was in the room till I heard her voice. Nor do I yet know how much she had heard of the conversation between her aunt and myself; for

although I sometimes see her look roguish even now that she is a middle-aged woman with many children, when anything is said which might be supposed to have a possible reference to that night, I have never cared to ask her.

"Here I am, grannie," said her voice. "But I won't be taken in hand by you or any one else. I tell you that. So mind. And Mr Walton is here, too, and Aunt Ethelwyn is going out with him for a long walk."

"What do you mean, you silly child?"

"I mean what I say," and "Miss Judy speaks the truth," fell together from her lips and mine.

"Mr Walton," began Mrs Oldcastle, indignantly, "it is scarcely like a gentleman to come where you are not wanted——"

Here Judy interrupted her.

"I beg your pardon, grannie, Mr Walton *was* wanted—very much wanted. I went and fetched him."

But Mrs Oldcastle went on unheeding.

"——and to be sitting in my room in the dark too!"

"That couldn't be helped, grannie. Here comes Sarah with candles."

"Sarah," said Mrs Oldcastle, "ask Captain Everard to be kind enough to step this way."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Sarah, with an untranslatable look at me as she set down the candles.

We could now see each other. Knowing words to be but idle breath, I would not complicate matters by speech, but stood silent, regarding Mrs Oldcastle. She on her part did not flinch, but returned my look with one both haughty and contemptuous. In a few moments, Captain Everard entered, bowed slightly, and looked to Mrs Oldcastle as if for an explanation. Whereupon she spoke, but to me.

"Mr Walton," she said, "will you explain

to Captain Everard to what we owe the *unexpected* pleasure of a visit from you?"

"Captain Everard has no claim to any explanation from me. To you, Mrs Oldcastle, I would have answered, had you asked me, that I was waiting for Miss Oldcastle."

"Pray inform Miss Oldcastle, Judy, that Mr Walton insists upon seeing her at once."

"That is quite unnecessary. Miss Oldcastle will be here presently," I said.

Mrs Oldcastle turned slightly livid with wrath. She was always white, as I have said: the change I can describe only by the word I have used, indicating a bluish darkening of the whiteness. She walked towards the door beside me. I stepped between her and it.

"Pardon me, Mrs Oldcastle. That is the way to Miss Oldcastle's room. I am here to protect her."

Without saying a word she turned and looked at Captain Everard. He advanced with a long

stride of determination. But ere he reached me, the door behind me opened, and Miss Oldcastle appeared in her bonnet and shawl, carrying a small bag in her hand. Seeing how things were, the moment she entered, she put her hand on my arm, and stood fronting the enemy with me. Judy was on my right, her eyes flashing, and her cheek as red as a peony, evidently prepared to do battle *à toute outrance* for her friends.

"Miss Oldcastle, go to your room instantly, I *command* you," said her mother; and she approached as if to remove her hand from my arm. I put my other arm between her and her daughter.

"No, Mrs Oldcastle," I said. "You have lost all a mother's rights by ceasing to behave like a mother. Miss Oldcastle will never more do anything in obedience to your *commands*, whatever she may do in compliance with your wishes."

"Allow me to remark," said Captain Everard, with attempted nonchalance, "that that is strange doctrine for your cloth."

"So much the worse for my cloth, then," I answered, "and the better for yours if it leads you to act more honourably."

Still keeping himself entrenched in the affectation of a supercilious indifference, he smiled haughtily, and gave a look of dramatic appeal to Mrs Oldcastle.

"At least," said that lady, "do not disgrace yourself, Ethelwyn, by leaving the house in this unaccountable manner at night and on foot. If you *will* leave the protection of your mother's roof, wait at least till to-morrow."

"I would rather spend the night in the open air than pass another under your roof, mother. You have been a strange mother to me—and Dorothy too!"

"At least do not put your character in question by going in this unmaidenly fashion.

People will talk to your prejudice—and Mr Walton's too."

Ethelwyn smiled.—She was now as collected as I was, seeming to have cast off all her weakness. My heart was uplifted more than I can say.—She knew her mother too well to be caught by the change in her tone.

I had not hitherto interrupted her once when she took the answer upon herself, for she was not one to be checked when she chose to speak. But now she answered nothing, only looked at me, and I understood her, of course.

"They will hardly have time to do so, I trust, before it will be out of their power. It rests with Miss Oldcastle herself to say when that shall be."

As if she had never suspected that such was the result of her scheming, Mrs Oldcastle's demeanour changed utterly. The form of her visage was altered. She made a spring at her daughter, and seized her by the arm.

"Then I forbid it," she screamed; "and I *will* be obeyed. I stand on my rights. Go to your room, you minx."

"There is no law human or divine to prevent her from marrying whom she will. How old are you, Ethelwyn?"

I thought it better to seem even cooler than I was.

"Twenty-seven," answered Miss Oldcastle.

"Is it possible you can be so foolish, Mrs Oldcastle, as to think you have the slightest hold on your daughter's freedom? Let her arm go."

But she kept her grasp.

"You hurt me, mother," said Miss Oldcastle.

"Hurt you? you smooth-faced hypocrite! I will hurt you then!"

But I took Mrs Oldcastle's arm in my hand, and she let go her hold.

"How dare you touch a woman?" she said.

"Because she has so far ceased to be a woman as to torture her own daughter."

Here Captain Everard stepped forward, saying,—

"The riot-act ought to be read, I think. It is time for the military to interfere."

"Well put, Captain Everard," I said. "Our side will disperse if you will only leave room for us to go."

"Possibly *I* may have something to say in the matter."

"Say on."

"This lady has jilted me."

"Have you, Ethelwyn?"

"I have not."

"Then, Captain Everard, you lie."

"You dare to tell me so?"

And he strode a pace nearer.

"It needs no daring. I know you too well; and so does another who trusted you and found you false as hell."

"You presume on your cloth, but ——" he said, lifting his hand.

"You may strike me, presuming on my cloth," I answered; "and I will not return your blow. Insult me as you will, and I will bear it. Call me coward, and I will say nothing. But lay one hand on me to prevent me from doing my duty, and I knock you down—or find you more of a man than I take you for."

It was either conscience or something not so good that made a coward of him. He turned on his heel.

"I really am not sufficiently interested in the affair to oppose you. You may take the girl for me. Both your cloth and the presence of ladies protect your insolence. I do not like brawling where one cannot fight. You shall hear from me before long, Mr Walton."

"No, Captain Everard, I shall not hear from you. You know you dare not write to me.

I know that of you which, even on the code of the duellist, would justify any gentleman in refusing to meet you. Stand out of my way!"

I advanced with Miss Oldcastle on my arm. He drew back; and we left the room.

As we reached the door, Judy bounded after us, threw her arms round her aunt's neck, then round mine, kissing us both, and returned to her place on the sofa. Mrs Oldcastle gave a scream, and sunk fainting on a chair. It was a last effort to detain her daughter and gain time. Miss Oldcastle would have returned, but I would not permit her.

"No," I said; "she will be better without you. Judy, ring the bell for Sarah."

"How dare you give orders in my house?" exclaimed Mrs Oldcastle, sitting bolt upright in the chair, and shaking her fist at us. Then assuming the heroic, she added, "From this moment she is no daughter of mine. Nor can you touch one farthing of her money, sir. You

have married a beggar after all, and that you'll both know before long."

"Thy money perish with thee!" I said, and repented the moment I had said it. It sounded like an imprecation, and I know I had no correspondent feeling; for, after all, she was the mother of my Ethelwyn. But the allusion to money made me so indignant, that the words burst from me ere I could consider their import.

The cool wind greeted us like the breath of God, as we left the house and closed the door behind us. The moon was shining from the edge of a vaporous mountain, which gradually drew away from her, leaving her alone in the midst of a lake of blue. But we had not gone many paces from the house when Miss Oldcastle began to tremble violently, and could scarcely get along with all the help I could give her. Nor, for the space of six weeks did one word pass between us about the painful

occurrences of that evening. For all that time she was quite unable to bear it.

When we managed at last to reach the vicarage, I gave her in charge to my sister, with instructions to help her to bed at once, while I went for Dr Duncan.

CHAPTER X.

OLD ROGERS'S THANKSGIVING.

I FOUND the old man seated at his dinner, which he left immediately when he heard that Miss Oldcastle needed his help. In a few words I told him, as we went, the story of what had befallen at the Hall, to which he listened with the interest of a boy reading a romance, asking twenty questions about the particulars which I hurried over. Then he shook me warmly by the hand, saying—

"You have fairly won her, Walton, and I

am as glad of it as I could be of anything I can think of. She is well worth all you must have suffered. This will at length remove the curse from that wretched family. You have saved her from perhaps even a worse fate than her sister's."

"I fear she will be ill, though," I said, "after all that she has gone through."

But I did not even suspect how ill she would be.

As soon as I heard Dr Duncan's opinion of her, which was not very definite, a great fear seized upon me that I was destined to lose her after all. This fear, however, terrible as it was, did not torture me like the fear that had preceded it. I could oftener feel able to say, "Thy will be done" than I could before.

Dr Duncan was hardly out of the house when Old Rogers arrived, and was shown into the study. He looked excited. I allowed him

to tell out his story, which was his daughter's of course, without interruption. He ended by saying :—

"Now, sir, you really must do summat. This won't do in a Christian country. We ain't aboard ship here with a nor'-easter a-walkin' the quarter-deck."

"There's no occasion, my dear old fellow, to do anything."

He was taken aback.

"Well, I don't understand you, Mr Walton. You're the last man I'd have expected to hear argufy for faith without works. It's right to trust in God; but if you don't stand to your halliards, your craft 'll miss stays, and your faith 'll be blown out of the bolt-ropes in the turn of a marlinspike."

I suspect there was some confusion in the figure, but the old man's meaning was plain enough. Nor would I keep him in a moment more of suspense.

"Miss Oldcastle is in the house, Old Rogers," I said.

"What house, sir?" returned the old man, his gray eyes opening wider as he spoke.

"This house, to be sure."

I shall never forget the look the old man cast upwards, or the reality given to it by the ordinarily odd sailor-fashion of pulling his forelock, as he returned inward thanks to the Father of all for His kindness to his friend. And never in my now wide circle of readers shall I find one, the most educated and responsive, who will listen to my story with a more gracious interest than that old man showed as I recounted to him the adventures of the evening. There were few to whom I could have told them: to Old Rogers I felt that it was right and natural and dignified to tell the story even of my love's victory.

How then am I able to tell it to the world as now? I can easily explain the seeming

inconsistency. It is not merely that I am speaking, as I have said before, from behind a screen, or as clothed in the coat of darkness of an anonymous writer; but I find that, as I come nearer and nearer to the invisible world, all my brothers and sisters grow dearer and dearer to me; I feel towards them more and more as the children of my Father in heaven; and although some of them are good children and some naughty children, some very lovable and some hard to love, yet I never feel that they are below me, or unfit to listen to the story even of my love, if they only care to listen; and if they do not care, there is no harm done, except they read it. Even should they, and then scoff at what seemed and seems to me the precious story, I have these defences: first, that it was not for them that I cast forth my precious pearls, for precious to me is the significance of every fact in my history—not that it is mine, for I

have only been as clay in the hands of the potter, but that it is God's, who made my history as it seemed and was good to Him; and second, that even should they trample them under their feet, they cannot well get at me to rend me. And more, the nearer I come to the region beyond, the more I feel that in that land a man needs not shrink from uttering his deepest thoughts, inasmuch as he that understands them not will not therefore revile him.—"But you are not there yet. You are in the land in which the brother speaketh evil of that which he understandeth not."—True, friend; too true. But I only do as Dr Donne did in writing that poem in his sickness, when he thought he was near to the world of which we speak: I rehearse now, that I may find it easier then.

"Since I am coming to that holy room,
Where, with the choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy music, as I come,

I tune the instrument here at the door;
And what I must do then, think here before."

When Rogers had thanked God, he rose, took my hand, and said :—

"Mr Walton, you *will* preach now. I thank God for the good we shall all get from the trouble you have gone through."

"I ought to be the better for it," I answered.

"You *will* be the better for it," he returned. "I believe I've allus been the better for any trouble as ever I had to go through with. I couldn't quite say the same for every bit of good luck I had; leastways, I consider trouble the best luck a man can have. And I wish you a good night, sir. Thank God! again."

"But, Rogers, you don't mean it would be good for us to have bad luck always, do you? You shouldn't be pleased at what's come to me now, in that case."

"No, sir, sartinly not."

"How can you say, then, that bad luck is the best luck?"

"I mean the bad luck that comes to us—not the bad luck that doesn't come. But you're right, sir. Good luck or bad luck's both best when *He* sends 'em, as He allus does. In fac', sir, there is no bad luck but what comes out o' the man hisself. The rest's all good."

But whether it was the consequence of a reaction from the mental strain I had suffered, or the depressing effect of Miss Oldcastle's illness coming so close upon the joy of winning her; or that I was more careless and less anxious to do my duty than I ought to have been—I greatly fear that Old Rogers must have been painfully disappointed in the sermons which I did preach for several of the following Sundays. He never even hinted at such a fact, but I felt it much myself. A man has often to be humbled through failure,

especially after success. I do not clearly know how my failures worked upon me; but I think a man may sometimes get spiritual good without being conscious of the point of its arrival, or being able to trace the process by which it was wrought in him. I believe that my failures did work some humility in me, and a certain carelessness of outward success even in spiritual matters, so far as the success affected me, provided only the will of God was done in the dishonour of my weakness. And I think, but I am not sure, that soon after I approached this condition of mind, I began to preach better. But still I found for some time that however much the subject of my sermon interested me in my study or in the church or vestry on the Saturday evening; nay, even although my heart was full of fervour during the prayers and lessons; no sooner had I begun to speak than the glow died out of the sky of my thoughts; a dull clearness of the intellectual

faculties took its place; and I was painfully aware that what I could speak without being moved myself was not the most likely utterance to move the feelings of those who only listened. Still a man may occasionally be used by the Spirit of God as the inglorious "trumpet of a prophecy" instead of being inspired with the life of the Word, and hence speaking out of a full heart in testimony of that which he hath known and seen.

I hardly remember when or how I came upon the plan, but now, as often as I find myself in such a condition, I turn away from any attempt to produce a sermon; and, taking up one of the sayings of our Lord which He himself has said "are spirit and are life," I labour simply to make the people see in it what I see in it; and when I find that thus my own heart is warmed, I am justified in the hope that the hearts of some at least of my hearers are thereby warmed likewise.

But no doubt the fact that the life of Miss Oldcastle seemed to tremble in the balance, had something to do with those results of which I may have already said too much. My design had been to go at once to London and make preparation for as early a wedding as she would consent to; but the very day after I brought her home, life and not marriage was the question. Dr Duncan looked very grave, and although he gave me all the encouragement he could, all his encouragement did not amount to much. There was such a lack of vitality about her! The treatment to which she had been for so long a time subjected had depressed her till life was nearly quenched from lack of hope. Nor did the sudden change seem able to restore the healthy action of what the old physicians called the animal spirits. Possibly the strong reaction paralysed their channels, and thus prevented her gladness from reaching her physical nature

so as to operate on its health. Her whole complaint appeared in excessive weakness. Finding that she fainted after every little excitement, I left her for four weeks entirely to my sister and Dr Duncan, during which time she never saw me; and it was long before I could venture to stay in her room more than a minute or two. But as the summer approached she began to show signs of reviving life, and by the end of May was able to be wheeled into the garden in a chair.

During her aunt's illness, Judy came often to the vicarage. But Miss Oldcastle was unable to see her any more than myself without the painful consequence which I have mentioned. So the dear child always came to me in the study, and through her endless vivacity infected me with some of her hope. For she had no fears whatever about her aunt's recovery.

I had had some painful apprehensions as to

the treatment Judy herself might meet with from her grandmother, and had been doubtful whether I ought not to have carried her off as well as her aunt; but the first time she came, which was the next day, she set my mind at rest on that subject.

"But does your grannie know where you are come?" I had asked her.

"So well, Mr Walton," she replied, "that there was no occasion to tell her. Why shouldn't I rebel as well as Aunt Wynnie, I wonder?" she added, looking archness itself.

"How does she bear it?"

"Bear what, Mr Walton?"

"The loss of your aunt."

"You don't think grannie cares about that, do you? She's vexed enough at the loss of Captain Everard.—Do you know, I think he had too much wine yesterday, or he wouldn't have made quite such a fool of himself."

"I fear he hadn't had quite enough to give

him courage, Judy. I daresay he was brave enough once, but a bad conscience soon destroys a man's courage."

"Why do you call it a bad conscience, Mr Walton? I should have thought that a bad conscience was one that would let a girl go on anyhow and say nothing about it to make her uncomfortable."

"You are quite right, Judy; that is the worst kind of conscience, certainly. But tell me, how does Mrs Oldcastle bear it?"

"You asked me that already."

Somehow Judy's words always seem more pert upon paper than they did upon her lips. Her *naïveté*, the twinkling light in her eyes, and the smile flitting about her mouth, always modified greatly the expression of her words.

"—Grannie never says a word about you or auntie either."

"But you said she was vexed: how do you know that?"

"Because ever since the captain went away this morning, she won't speak a word to Sarah even."

"Are you not afraid of her locking you up some day or other?"

"Not a bit of it. Grannie won't touch me. And you shouldn't tempt me to run away from her like auntie. I won't. Grannie is a naughty old lady, and I don't believe anybody loves her but me — not Sarah, I'm certain. Therefore I can't leave her, and I won't leave her, Mr Walton, whatever you may say about her."

"Indeed, I don't want you to leave her, Judy."

And Judy did not leave her as long as she lived. And the old lady's love to that child was at least one redeeming point in her fierce character. No one can tell how much good it may have done her before she died—though but a few years passed before her soul was re-

quired of her. Before that time came, however, a quarrel took place between her and Sarah, which quarrel I incline to regard as a hopeful sign. And to this day Judy has never heard how her old grannie treated her mother. When she learns it now from these pages I think she will be glad that she did not know it before her death.

The old lady would see neither doctor nor parson; nor would she hear of sending for her daughter. The only sign of softening that she gave was that once she folded her granddaughter in her arms and wept long and bitterly. Perhaps the thought of her dying child came back upon her, along with the reflection that the only friend she had was the child of that marriage which she had persecuted to dissolution.

CHAPTER XI.

TOM'S STORY.

MY reader will perceive that this part of my story is drawing to a close. It embraces but a brief period of my life, and I have plenty more behind not altogether unworthy of record. But the portions of any man's life most generally interesting are those in which, while the outward history is most stirring, it derives its chief significance from accompanying conflict within. It is not the rapid change of events, or the unusual concourse of circumstances that alone can interest the thoughtful mind; while, on

the other hand, internal change and tumult can be ill set forth to the reader, save they be accompanied and in part, at least, occasioned by outward events capable of embodying and elucidating the things that are of themselves unseen. For man's life ought to be a whole; and not to mention the spiritual necessities of our nature—to leave the fact alone that a man is a mere thing of shreds and patches until his heart is united, as the Psalmist says, to fear the name of God—to leave these considerations aside, I say, no man's life is fit for representation as a work of art save in proportion as there has been a significant relation between his outer and inner life, a visible outcome of some sort of harmony between them. Therefore I chose the portion in which I had suffered most, and in which the outward occurrences of my own life had been most interesting, for the fullest representation; while I reserve for a more occasional and fragmentary

record many things in the way of experience, thought, observation, and facts in the history both of myself and individuals of my flock, which admit of, and indeed require, a more individual treatment than would be altogether suitable to a continuous story. But before I close this part of my communications with those whom I count my friends, for till they assure me of the contrary I mean to flatter myself with considering my readers generally as such, I must gather up the ends of my thread, and dispose them in such a manner that they shall neither hang too loose, nor yet refuse length enough for what my friend Rogers would call *splicing*.

It was yet summer when Miss Oldcastle and I were married. It was to me a day awful in its gladness. She was now quite well, and no shadow hung upon her half-moon forehead. We went for a fortnight into Wales, and then returned to the vicarage and the

duties of the parish, in which my wife was quite ready to assist me.

Perhaps it would help the wives of some clergymen out of some difficulties, and be their protection against some reproaches, if they would at once take the position with regard to the parishioners which Mrs Walton took, namely, that of their servant, but not in her own right—in her husband's. She saw, and told them so, that the best thing she could do for them was to help me, that she held no office whatever in the parish, and they must apply to me when anything went amiss. Had she not constantly refused to be a "judge or a divider," she would have been constantly troubled with quarrels too paltry to be referred to me, and which were the sooner forgotten that the litigants were not drawn on further and further into the desert of dispute by the mirage of a justice that could quench no thirst. Only when any such

affair was brought before me, did she use her good offices to bring about a right feeling between the contending parties, generally next-door neighbours, and mostly women, who, being at home all day, found their rights clash in a manner that seldom happened with those that worked in the fields. Whatever her counsel could do, however, had full scope through me, who earnestly sought it. And whatever she gave the poor, she gave as a private person, out of her own pocket. She never administered the communion offering—that is, after finding out, as she soon did, that it was a source of endless dispute between some of the recipients, who regarded it as their common property, and were never satisfied with what they received. This is the case in many country parishes, I fear. As soon as I came to know it, I simply told the recipients that, although the communion-offering belonged to them, yet

the distribution of it rested entirely with me; and that I would distribute it neither according to their fancied merits nor the degree of friendship I felt for them, but according to the best judgment I could form as to their necessities; and if any of them thought these were underrated, they were quite at liberty to make a fresh representation of them to me; but that I, who knew more about their neighbours than it was likely they did, and was not prejudiced by the personal regards which they could hardly fail to be influenced by, was more likely than they were to arrive at an equitable distribution of the money—upon my principles if not on theirs. And at the same time I tried to show them that a very great part of the disputes in the world came from our having a very keen feeling of our own troubles, and a very dull feeling of our neighbour's; for if the case was reversed, and our neighbour's condition became ours, ten to

one our judgment would be reversed likewise. And I think some of them got some sense out of what I said. But I ever found the great difficulty in my dealing with my people to be the preservation of the authority which was needful for service; for when the elder serve the younger—and in many cases it is not age that determines seniority—they must not forget that without which the service they offer will fail to be received as such by those to whom it is offered. At the same time they must ever take heed that their claim to authority be founded on the truth, and not on ecclesiastical or social position. Their standing in the church accredits their offer of service: the service itself can only be accredited by the Truth and the Lord of Truth, who is the servant of all.

But it cost both me and my wife some time and some suffering before we learned how to deport ourselves in these respects.

In the same manner she avoided the too near, because unprofitable, approaches of a portion of the richer part of the community. For from her probable position in time to come, rather than her position in time past, many of the fashionable people in the county began to call upon her—in no small degree to her annoyance, simply from the fact that she and they had so little in common. So, while she performed all towards them that etiquette demanded, she excused herself from the closer intimacy which some of them courted, on the ground of the many duties which naturally fell to the parson's wife in a country-parish like ours; and I am sure that long before we had gained the footing we now have, we had begun to reap the benefits of this mode of regarding our duty in the parish as one, springing from the same source, and tending to the same end. The parson's wife who takes to herself authority in virtue of her

position, and the parson's wife who disclaims all connexion with the professional work of her husband, are equally out of place in being parson's wives. The one who refuses to serve denies her greatest privilege; the one who will be a mistress receives the greater condemnation. When the wife is one with her husband, and the husband is worthy, the position will soon reveal itself.

But there cannot be many clergymen's wives amongst my readers; and I may have occupied more space than reasonable with this "large discourse." I apologize, and, there is room to fear, go on to do the same again.

As I write I am seated in that little octagonal room overlooking the quarry, with its green lining of trees, and its deep central well. It is my study now. My wife is not yet too old to prefer the little room in which she thought and suffered so much, to every other,

although the stair that leads to it is high and steep. Nor do I object to her preference because there is no ready way to reach it save through this: I see her the oftener. And although I do not like any one to look over my shoulder while I write—it disconcerts me somehow—yet the moment the sheet is finished and flung on the heap, it is her property, as the print, reader, is yours. I hear her step overhead now. She is opening her window. Now I hear her door close; and now her foot is on the stair.

"Come in, love. I have just finished another sheet. There it is. What shall I end the book with? What shall I tell the friends with whom I have been conversing so often and so long for the last thing ere for a little while I bid them good-bye?"

And Ethelwyn bends her smooth forehead —for she has a smooth forehead still, although the hair that crowns it is almost white—over

the last few sheets; and while she reads, I will tell those who will read, one of the good things that come of being married. It is, that there is one face upon which the changes come without your seeing them; or rather, there is one face which you can still see the same through all the shadows which years have gathered and heaped upon it. No, stay; I have got a better way of putting it still: there is one face whose final beauty you can see the more clearly as the bloom of youth departs, and the loveliness of wisdom and the beauty of holiness take its place; for in it you behold all that you loved before, veiled, it is true, but glowing with gathered brilliance under the veil ("Stop one moment, my dear") from which it will one day shine out like the moon from under a cloud, when a stream of the upper air floats it from off her face.

"Now, Ethelwyn, I am ready. What shall I write about next?"

"I don't think you have told them anywhere about Tom."

"No more I have. I meant to do so. But I am ashamed of it."

"The more reason to tell it."

"You are quite right. I will go on with it at once. But you must not stand there behind me. When I was a child, I could always confess best when I hid my face with my hands."

"Besides," said Ethelwyn, without seeming to hear what I said, "I do not want to have people saying that the vicar has made himself out so good that nobody can believe in him."

"That would be a great fault in my book, Ethelwyn. What does it come from in me? Let me see. I do not think I want to appear better than I am; but it sounds hypocritical to make merely general confessions, and it is indecorous to make particular ones. Besides, I doubt if it is good to write much about bad things even in the way of confession——"

"Well, well, never mind justifying it," said Ethelwyn. "*I* don't want any justification. But here is a chance for you. The story, will, I think, do good and not harm. You had better tell it, I do think. So if you are inclined, I will go away at once, and let you go on without interruption. You will have it finished before dinner, and Tom is coming, and you can tell him what you have done."

So, reader, now my wife has left me, I will begin. It shall not be a long story.

As soon as my wife and I had settled down at home, and I had begun to arrange my work again, it came to my mind that for a long time I had been doing very little for Tom Weir. I could not blame myself much for this, and I was pretty sure neither he nor his father blamed me at all; but I now saw that it was time we should recommence something definite in the way of study. When he came to my house the next morning, and I proceeded to

acquaint myself with what he had been doing, I found to my great pleasure that he had made very considerable progress both in Latin and Mathematics, and I resolved that I would now push him a little. I found this only brought out his mettle; and his progress, as it seemed to me, was extraordinary. Nor was this all. There were such growing signs of goodness in addition to the uprightness which had first led to our acquaintance, that although I carefully abstained from making the suggestion to him, I was more than pleased when I discovered, from some remark he made, that he would gladly give himself to the service of the Church. At the same time I felt compelled to be the more cautious in anything I said, from the fact that the prospect of the social elevation which would be involved in the change might be a temptation to him, as no doubt it has been to many a man of humble birth. However, as I continued to observe

him closely, my conviction was deepened that he was rarely fitted for ministering to his fellows; and soon it came to speech between his father and me, when I found that Thomas, so far from being unfavourably inclined to the proposal, was prepared to spend the few savings of his careful life upon his education. To this, however, I could not listen, because there was his daughter Mary, who was very delicate, and his grandchild too, for whom he ought to make what little provision he could. I therefore took the matter in my own hands, and by means of a judicious combination of experience and what money I could spare, I managed, at less expense than most parents suppose to be unavoidable, to maintain my young friend at Oxford till such time as he gained a fellowship. I felt justified in doing so in part from the fact that some day or other Mrs Walton would inherit the Oldcastle property, as well as come into possession of certain moneys of

her own, now in the trust of her mother and two gentlemen in London, which would be nearly sufficient to free the estate from incumbrance, although she could not touch it as long as her mother lived and chose to refuse her the use of it, at least without a law-suit, with which neither of us was inclined to have anything to do. But I did not lose a penny by the affair. For of the very first money Tom received after he had got his fellowship, he brought the half to me, and continued to do so until he had repaid me every shilling I had spent upon him. As soon as he was in deacon's orders, he came to assist me for a while as curate, and I found him a great help and comfort. He occupied the large room over his father's shop which had been his grandfather's: he had been dead for some years.

I was now engaged on a work which I had been contemplating for a long time, upon the development of the love of Nature as shown

in the earlier literature of the Jews and Greeks, through that of the Romans, Italians, and other nations, with the Anglo-Saxon for a fresh starting-point, into its latest forms in Gray, Thomson, Cowper, Crabbe, Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson; and Tom supplied me with much of the time which I bestowed upon this object, and I was really grateful to him. But, in looking back, and trying to account to myself for the snare into which I fell, I see plainly enough that I thought too much of what I had done for Tom, and too little of the honour God had done me in allowing me to help Tom. I took the high-daïs-throne over him, not consciously I believe, but still with a contemptible condescension, not of manner but of heart, so delicately refined by the innate sophistry of my selfishness, that the better nature in me called it only fatherly friendship, and did not recognize it as that abominable thing so favoured of all those that especially worship

themselves. But I abuse my fault instead of confessing it.

One evening, a gentle tap came to my door, and Tom entered. He looked pale and anxious, and there was an uncertainty about his motions which I could not understand.

"What is the matter, Tom?" I asked.

"I wanted to say something to you, sir," answered Tom.

"Say on," I returned, cheerily.

"It is not so easy to say, sir," rejoined Tom, with a faint smile. "Miss Walton, sir——"

"Well, what of her? There's nothing happened to her? She was here a few minutes ago—though, now I think of it——"

Here a suspicion of the truth flashed on me, and struck me dumb. I am now covered with shame to think how, when the thing approached myself on that side, it swept away for the moment all my fine theories about the equality of men in Christ their Head. How

could Tom Weir, whose father was a joiner, who had been a lad in a London shop himself, dare to propose marrying my sister? Instead of thinking of what he really was, my regard rested upon this and that stage through which he had passed to reach his present condition. In fact, I regarded him rather as of my making than of God's.

Perhaps it might do something to modify the scorn of all classes for those beneath them, to consider that, by regarding others thus, they justify those above them in looking down upon them in their turn, In London shops, I am credibly informed, the young women who serve in the show-rooms, or behind the counters, are called *ladies*, and talk of the girls who make up the articles for sale as *persons*. To the learned professions, however, the distinction between the shopwomen and milliners is, from their superior height, unrecognizable; while doctors and lawyers are again, I doubt not,

massed by countesses and other blue-blooded realities, with the literary lions who roar at *soirées* and kettle-drums, or even with chiropodists and violin-players! But I am growing scornful at scorn, and forget that I too have been scornful. Brothers, sisters, all good men and true women, let the Master seat us where He will. Until he says, "Come up higher," let us sit at the foot of the board, or stand behind, honoured in waiting upon His guests. All that kind of thing is worth nothing in the kingdom; and nothing will be remembered of us but the Master's judgment.

I have known a good churchwoman who would be sweet as a sister to the abject poor, but offensively condescending to a shopkeeper or a dissenter, exactly as if he was a Pariah, and she a Brahmin. I have known good people who were noble and generous towards their so-called inferiors and full of the rights of the race—until it touched their own family,

and just no longer. Yea I, who had talked like this for years, at once, when Tom Weir wanted to marry my sister, lost my faith in the broad lines of human distinction, judged according to appearances in which I did not even believe, and judged not righteous judgment.

"For," reasoned the world in me, "is it not too bad to drag your wife in for such an alliance? Has she not lowered herself enough already? Has she not married far below her accredited position in society? Will she not feel injured by your family if she see it capable of forming such a connexion?"

What answer I returned to Tom I hardly know. I remember that the poor fellow's face fell, and that he murmured something which I did not heed. And then I found myself walking in the garden under the great cedar, having stepped out of the window almost unconsciously, and left Tom standing

there alone. It was very good of him ever to forgive me.

Wandering about in the garden, my wife saw me from her window, and met me as I turned a corner in the shrubbery.

And now I am going to have my revenge upon her in a way she does not expect, for making me tell the story: I will tell her share in it.

"What is the matter with you, Henry?" she asked.

"Oh, not much," I answered. "Only that Weir has been making me rather uncomfortable."

"What has he been doing?" she inquired, in some alarm. "It is not possible he has done anything wrong."

My wife trusted him as much as I did.

"No—o—o," I answered. "Not anything exactly wrong."

"It must be very nearly wrong, Henry, to make you look so miserable."

I began to feel ashamed and more uncomfortable.

"He has been falling in love with Martha," I said; "and when I put one thing to another, I fear he may have made her fall in love with him too." My wife laughed merrily.

"What a wicked curate!"

"Well, but you know it is not exactly agreeable."

"Why?"

"You know why well enough."

"At least, I am not going to take it for granted. Is he not a good man?"

"Yes."

"Is he not a well-educated man?"

"As well as myself—for his years."

"Is he not clever?"

"One of the cleverest fellows I ever met."

"Is he not a gentleman?"

"I have not a fault to find with his manners."

"Nor with his habits?" my wife went on.

"No."

"Nor with his ways of thinking?"

"No.—But, Ethelwyn, you know what I mean quite well. His family, you know."

"Well, is his father not a respectable man?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. Thoroughly respectable."

"He wouldn't borrow money of his tailor instead of paying for his clothes, would he?"

"Certainly not."

"And if he were to die to-day he would carry no debts to heaven with him?"

"I believe not."

"Does he bear false witness against his neighbour?"

"No. He scorns a lie as much as any man I ever knew."

"Which of the commandments is it in particular that he breaks, then?"

"None that I know of; excepting that no

one can keep them yet that is only human. He tries to keep every one of them I do believe."

"Well, I think Tom very fortunate in having such a father. I wish my mother had been as good."

"That is all true, and yet——"

"And yet, suppose a young man you liked had had a fashionable father who had ruined half a score of tradespeople by his extravagance—would you object to him because of his family?"

"Perhaps not."

"Then, with you, position outweighs honesty—in fathers, at least."

To this I was not ready with an answer, and my wife went on.

"It might be reasonable if you did though, from fear least he should turn out like his father.—But do you know why I would not accept your offer of taking my name when I should succeed to the property?"

"You said you liked mine better," I answered.

"So I did. But I did not tell you that I was ashamed that my good husband should take a name which for centuries had been borne by hard-hearted, worldly-minded people, who, to speak the truth of my ancestors to my husband, were neither gentle, nor honest, nor high-minded."

"Still, Ethelwyn, you know there is something in it, though it is not so easy to say what. And you avoid that. I suppose Martha has been talking you over to her side."

"Harry," my wife said, with a shade of solemnity, "I am almost ashamed of you for the first time. And I will punish you by telling you the truth. Do you think I had nothing of that sort to get over when I began to find that I was thinking a little more about you than was quite convenient under the circumstances? Your manners, dear Harry, though irreproachable, just had not the tone

that I had been accustomed to. There was a diffidence about you also that did not at first advance you in my regard."

"Yes, yes," I answered, a little piqued, "I dare say. I have no doubt you thought me a boor."

"Dear Harry!"

"I beg your pardon, wifie. I know you didn't. But it is quite bad enough to have brought you down to my level, without sinking you still lower."

"Now there you are wrong, Harry. And that is what I want to show you. I found that my love to you would not be satisfied with making an exception in your favour. I must see what force there really was in the notions I had been bred in."

"Ah!" I said. "I see. You looked for a principle in what you had thought was an exception."

"Yes," returned my wife; "and I soon

found one. And the next step was to throw away all false judgment in regard to such things. And so I can see more clearly than you into the right of this matter.—Would you hesitate a moment between Tom Weir and the dissolute son of an earl, Harry?"

"You know I would not."

"Well, just carry out the considerations that suggests, and you will find that where there is everything personally noble, pure, simple, and good, the lowliness of a man's birth is but an added honour to him; for it shows that his nobility is altogether from within him, and therefore is his own. It cannot then have been put on him by education or imitation, as many men's manners are, who wear their good breeding like their fine clothes, or as the Pharisee his prayers, to be seen of men."

"But his sister?"

"Harry, Harry! You were preaching last

Sunday about the way God thinks of things. And you said that was the only true way of thinking about them. Would the Mary that poured the ointment on Jesus's head have refused to marry a good man because he was the brother of that Mary who poured it on His feet? Have you thought what God would think of Tom for a husband to Martha?"

I did not answer, for conscience had begun to speak. When I lifted my eyes from the ground, thinking Ethelwyn stood beside me, she was gone. I felt as if she were dead, to punish me for my pride. But still I could not get over it, though I was ashamed to follow and find her. I went and got my hat instead, and strolled out.

What was it that drew me towards Thomas Weir's shop? I think it must have been incipient repentance — a feeling that I had wronged the man. But just as I turned the

corner, and the smell of the wood reached me, the picture so often associated in my mind with such a scene of human labour, rose before me. I saw the Lord of Life bending over His bench, fashioning some lowly utensil for some housewife of Nazareth. And He would receive payment for it too; for He at least could see no disgrace in the order of things that His Father had appointed. It is the vulgar mind that looks down on the earning and worships the inheriting of money. How infinitely more poetic is the belief that our Lord did His work like any other honest man, than that straining after His glorification in the early centuries of the Church by the invention of fables even to the disgrace of his father! They say that Joseph was a bad carpenter, and our Lord had to work miracles to set the things right which he had made wrong! To such a class of mind as invented these fables do those belong who think they honour our Lord when they judge

anything human too common or too unclean for Him to have done.

And the thought sprung up at once in my mind—"If I ever see our Lord face to face, how shall I feel if He says to me, 'Didst thou do well to murmur that thy sister espoused a certain man for that in his youth he had earned his bread as I earned mine? Where was then thy right to say unto me, Lord, Lord?'"

I hurried into the workshop.

"Has Tom told you about it?" I said.

"Yes, sir. And I told him to mind what he was about; for he was not a gentleman, and you was, sir."

"I hope I am. And Tom is as much a gentleman as I have any claim to be."

Thomas Weir held out his hand.

"Now, sir, I do believe you mean in my shop what you say in your pulpit; and there is *one* Christian in the world at least. —But what will your good lady say?

She 's higher-born than you — no offence, sir."

"Ah, Thomas, you shame me. I am not so good as you think me. It was my wife that brought me to reason about it."

"God bless her."

"Amen. I 'm going to find Tom."

At the same moment Tom entered the shop, with a very melancholy face. He started when he saw me, and looked confused.

"Tom, my boy," I said, "I behaved very badly to you. I am sorry for it. Come back with me, and have a walk with my sister. I don't think she 'll be sorry to see you."

His face brightened up at once, and we left the shop together. Evidently with a great effort Tom was the first to speak.

"I know, sir, how many difficulties my presumption must put you in."

"Not another word about it, Tom. You are blameless. I wish I were. If we only

act as God would have us, other considerations may look after themselves—or, rather, He will look after them. The world will never be right till the mind of God is the measure of things, and the will of God the law of things. In the kingdom of Heaven nothing else is acknowledged. And till that kingdom come, the mind and will of God must, with those that look for that kingdom, over-ride every other way of thinking, feeling, and judging. I see it more plainly than ever I did. Take my sister, in God's name, Tom, and be good to her."

Tom went to find Martha, and I to find Ethelwyn.

"It is all right," I said, "even to the shame I feel at having needed your reproof."

"Don't think of that. God gives us all time to come to our right minds, you know," answered my wife.

"But how did you get on so far a-head of me, wifie?"

Ethelwyn laughed.

"Why," she said, "I only told you back again what you have been telling me for the last seven or eight years."

So to me the message had come first, but my wife had answered first with the deed.

And now I have had my revenge on her.

Next to her and my children, Tom has been my greatest comfort for many years. He is still my curate, and I do not think we shall part till death part us for a time. My sister is worth twice what she was before, though they have no children. We have many, and they have taught me much.

Thomas Weir is now too old to work any longer. He occupies his father's chair in the large room of the old house. The workshop I have had turned into a schoolroom, of the external condition of which his daughter takes

good care, while a great part of her brother Tom's time is devoted to the children; for he and I agree that, where it can be done, the pastoral care ought to be at least equally divided between the sheep and the lambs. For the sooner the children are brought under right influences—I do not mean a great deal of religious speech, but the right influences of truth and honesty, and an evident regard to what God wants of us—not only are they the more easily wrought upon, but the sooner do they recognize those influences as right and good. And while Tom quite agrees with me that there must not be much talk about religion, he thinks that there must be just the more acting upon religion; and that if it be everywhere at hand in all things taught and done, it will be ready to show itself to every one who looks for it. And besides that action is more powerful than speech in the inculcation of religion, Tom says there is no such

corrective of sectarianism of every kind as the repression of speech and the encouragement of action.

Besides being a great help to me and everybody else almost in Marshmallows, Tom has distinguished himself in the literary world; and when I read his books, I am yet prouder of my brother-in-law. I am only afraid that Martha is not good enough for him. But she certainly improves, as I have said already.

Jane Rogers was married to young Brownrigg about a year after we were married. The old man is all but confined to the chimney-corner now, and Richard manages the farm, though not quite to his father's satisfaction, of course. But they are doing well notwithstanding. The old mill has been superseded by one of new and rare device, built by Richard; but the old cottage where his wife's parents lived has slowly mouldered back to the dust.

For the old people have been dead for many

years. Often in the summer days as I go to or come from the vestry, I sit down for a moment on the turf that covers my old friend, and think that every day is mouldering away this body of mine till it shall fall a heap of dust into its appointed place. But what is that to me? It is to me the drawing nigh of the fresh morning of life, when I shall be young and strong again, glad in the presence of the wise and beloved dead, and unspeakably glad in the presence of my God, which I have now but hope to possess far more hereafter.

I will not take a solemn leave of my friends just yet. For I hope to hold a little more communion with them ere I go hence. I know that my mental faculty is growing weaker, but some power yet remains; and I say to myself, "Perhaps this is the final trial of your faith—to trust in God to take care of your intellect for you, and to believe, in weakness, the truths He revealed to you in strength.

Remember that Truth depends not upon your seeing it, and believe as you saw when your sight was at its best. For then you saw that the Truth was beyond all you could see." Thus I try to prepare for dark days that may come, but which cannot come without God in them.

And meantime I hope to be able to communicate some more of the good things experience and thought have taught me, and it may be some more of the events that have befallen my friends and myself in our pilgrimage. So, kind readers, God be with you. That is the older and better form of *Good-bye.*

END OF VOL. III.

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